

== NICK NORCROSS AGAIN ON DECK! ==



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DICK DOOM'S BIG HAUL.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



BUT THE GHOSTLY FORM DID NOT MOVE, AND ONLY A LOW GROAN CAME FROM THE LIPS OF THE WEIRD VISITOR.

Dick Doom's Big Haul;

OR,

The Rogue Round-up in Chicago.

A Romance of the World's Fair City.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE DICK DOOM NOVELS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRISONER'S THREAT.

"EITHER set me free from this prison, or you hang; so take your choice, Scott Scofield."

The speaker was a man locked in a cell of the Chicago City Prison, and the one he addressed was a guard.

They were strange words to come from a prisoner, and he spoken to a keeper—the one a guardian of the peace, a catcher of criminals, the other a man upon whom rested the charge of murder, and the murder of a young and beautiful girl at that.

But the words were spoken in deadly earnestness, and in the nature of a threat that would be carried out.

The prisoner was a tall, handsomely formed man of thirty, with a face to command admiration, if not respect, for the features were cast in a perfect mold, the eyes were fascinating in their expression, while a look of refinement was stamped upon him that showed that he was an aristocrat.

He was elegantly dressed, though not in a flashy manner, wore a diamond of rare beauty in his scarf, a massive seal ring upon the little finger of his left hand, and a watch and chain, for he had requested, when put in prison, not to have his valuables taken from him until it was decided to hold him or not, on the charge against him.

The one who entered his cell was attired in the uniform of the prison, and though he held power over his freedom, he stood humbly before the prisoner, and, in response to his threat said pleadingly:

"No, no, Mr. Sanford, you would not be so cruel—you would not do that."

"It is just what I will do, Scott Scofield—hang you, if you do not set me free!" was the determined response.

"You have no proof," whispered the man.

"You have no proof of your innocence, and I can prove your guilt, and you will hang."

"My God! don't say that, for I am utterly powerless here to help you."

"You are not!"

"I could not save you, gladly as I would do so if it was in my power."

"You can and must save me or suffer the consequences, for I shall send for the chief and tell him the whole story."

"No, sir! do not do that, but give me time to think."

"And while you are thinking, I suffer."

"Have you any plan?"

"Is there a man in this prison who looks like you?"

"Yes, there is."

"And is he on duty at the same time?"

"He is, and ours is the night watch."

"Then go and get a false beard like yours, wear two suits of clothes, one under the other, and come here to-night, prepared to aid my escape."

"I suppose I must."

"If you do not, you know they will hang me for the murder of that girl."

"Are you guilty?" asked the officer.

The response was a derisive laugh, and the officer said:

"I believe that you are guilty."

"That is your belief regarding me, but I happen to know that you murdered—"

"Don't say any more, for God's sake, and I will help you."

"See that you do, for I have no desire to stay in this black hole longer than I must do

so, and if I do not escape I will have to hang, innocent or guilty, and you shall keep me company, for you can save me if you will."

"I will," groaned the officer and he departed from the cell, his face pale and his look one of intense anxiety, amounting almost to despair.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY FERRETS.

"I SAY, boys, you have all heard of Dick Doom?"

"Yes, the mysterious detective—the Silent Man-Hunter."

"That is the man."

"They call him, too, the Ferret of the Golden Fetters."

"Yes that they does."

"Some says he is a woman in man's rig."

"Nobody knows who he is."

"He's a dandy on disguisin' hisself, I has heard."

"Shut up, all of yez, and hear what Cap'n Nick has ter say," growled a voice with the true Limerick brogue, and there was at once a dead silence.

"Cap'n Nick Norcross," as he was spoken of, had been the one to ask the question that opens this chapter.

He was a handsome youth of seventeen perhaps, with a wiry form and a graceful movement, well dressed and in appearance the superior of his comrades in birth and education.

He had entered a room where there were eleven other youths, ranging from twelve to twenty years of age, and was accompanied by a rather hard-faced looking boy of about his own age.

Those gathered there were dressed in costumes that were picturesque to say the least, and their nominal occupations were set down as bootblackening, paper-venders and general utility boys.

To the police of Chicago they were known as the River Rats, and they were hunted with a determination on the part of the officers of the law to wipe out the band, which was suspected of being guilty of innumerable misdeeds, both great and small.

In fact, whenever the police could not catch a criminal he was set down as a River Rat, and half the crimes in the calendar were laid at the door of that gathering, the thirteen youths there in the room which the two last comers had entered through a trap in the floor.

Urged to continue what he had come there to tell them, Nick Norcross, speaking in a voice strangely soft toned and winning, and using good language, greatly in contrast to that spoken by his comrades, said:

"Well, boys, I was going to say that Dick Doom ran down the murderer of that beautiful girl, Miss Estelle Enders, whose body was found in a boat on the shore of the grounds of millionaire Marlborough's mansion."

"And you helped him run him down, Cap'n Nick," said Pete Pepper, the one who had entered the room with their "chief."

"Oh, yes, I helped, as you did, Pete, and all of us; but we would not have solved the mystery of the murder had not Dick Doom come here to shadow the affair."

"But this is what I wish to say, and that is—that we are to be in the pay of Dick Doom, and go regularly to work as Boy Ferrets."

A murmur of approval ran around the room at this, and Nick Norcross continued:

"Now, you all know just how the band was originated, and the laws that bind us together."

"When I was arrested by the detectives as the murderer of Miss Enders, or as an accomplice, you all, to save me, when you were hunted down and put behind the bars, told the story of my killing Giant Jack, the ex-convict, as you knew it, and these stories Dick Doom worked on and so solved the

mystery until he got Merton Sanford behind the bars.

"Now, Dick Doom says that he wants us to work for him, to get a hiding place and have our meetings there, but to continue our various occupations, as now."

"But the police will still hunt us?" urged one.

"Oh yes, but we won't mind that, for we'll be Boy Ferrets, drawing pay, and I'll report what we shadow each week, and oftener, if there is need of it."

"I happen to know a dandy hiding place, and so there we will go, if you all say the word, only you must take the oath of allegiance over again, and now."

"We will!" came in a chorus of voices, and ten minutes after the band was formed and named "The Boy Ferrets," with Nick Norcross as chief and Pete Pepper as his aide.

CHAPTER III.

DICK DOOM IN DISGUISE.

STANDING by a window of the Leland Hotel in Chicago, gazing out upon the lake, was a young man with a face that was strikingly marked, so full was it of stern decision, perfection of features and a fascination which in a woman would have made it beautiful.

The look of daring and stern resolve then upon it kept it from being effeminate, though a casual observer would have called it so.

He was stylishly dressed, and about him was an evidence of luxury, in the handsomely furnished parlor and adjoining bedrooms, one on either side.

The man was Dick Doom, who has won fame as a Man of Mystery and whom his fellow detectives knew as the "Ferret of the Golden Fetters."

Who Dick Doom really is it is said but one man really knows and he is the chief of the Secret Service Bureau at New Orleans.

To the other chiefs he is known only as Dick Doom of the United States Detective Service, and he has been called in to solve mysterious cases from New York to San Francisco, and from New Orleans to Chicago.

If it is his pleasure to appear before chiefs of the Secret Service, who are unacquainted with him, in disguise, whether as a man or woman, he does so, and the very people about Headquarters never know him as he really is.

A most remarkable murder case, reported as a suicide, and with every evidence to prove it so, had called him to Chicago.

He had appeared as an Indiana farmer, taken the trail which had baffled all others, and had, while in the lower part of the city, been set upon by robbers and would have lost his life but for a rescue by Nick Norcross and his River Rats.

In the young captain of this hunted band of youths, Dick Doom had seen good material to work with, and with their aid he had shadowed down the suicide as a murder, and had arrested a fashionable young man of the city as the murderer, on the eve of his marriage to a rich and lovely heiress of the Western Metropolis.

But the getting of the accused behind the iron bars was only half the battle Dick Doom well knew, and then it became his duty to prove his charge that Merton Sanford had taken the life of Estelle Enders.

To do this he had called in his boy ally, Nick Norcross with his River Rats, well knowing what valuable aides they would be, even though they were under the ban of the police as suspects and burglar spies.

Now, as he stood by the window gazing out upon the great lake, and the moving vessels in sight, he was too deeply wrapped in his scheming meditations to enjoy the view.

His mind was busy in plotting, and though his eyes were upon the scene before him he yet seemed not to behold it.

Suddenly he started, glanced at his watch and muttered:

"I must be ready to meet the boy in my disguise, for he must not know me as I am, though I do trust him, perfectly."

So saying he entered the bedroom upon his right, and at once began to make his toilet.

In half an hour he returned to the sitting-room and no one would ever have suspected him as the stylishly-dressed young man who had been standing by the window.

His face had been increased in fullness by the aid of "plumpers" placed in each cheek, and a wig of jet-black hair, tinged with gray which seemed most natural, covered his own locks.

He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, with slightly darkened glasses, and a clerical suit of black, with a white tie; in fact, he would have been taken for a clergyman of forty.

As he entered the parlor a knock came at the door, so, quickly seating himself and taking up a Bible he said in a deep voice:

"Come in!"

The door was opened by a bell-boy and there entered behind him none other than Nick Norcross, the Captain of the River Rats.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMPACT.

THE bell-boy closed the door behind the young visitor, who started at seeing one who looked like a stranger to him and said:

"Pardon me, sir, but there is some mistake."

"Whom did you come to see, my son?" asked the pretended clergyman in sonorous tones.

"Mr. Richardson of Indiana, sir."

"Sit down, for I am Mr. Richardson."

"Not the one I wish to see, sir."

"I am his son, the Reverend Richard Richardson, my boy."

"I did not know that the gentleman I came to see had a son, sir. In fact, he is—"

Nick Norcross stopped, for he knew Dick Doom to be a young man, in spite of the disguise he had seen him in as an old "hayseed" from Indiana, and he was about to say so.

"You are Nick Norcross?" queried the son of Mr. Richardson.

"Yes, sir," in some surprise.

"The captain of the River Rats?"

"You know this, sir?" in yet greater surprise.

"Yes, Nick, as I know that I am the one you came to see, for I am Dick Doom, as also the old Hayseed from Indiana."

Nick gave a whistle to express his amazement and said:

"Well, sir, your disguise is perfect, Mr. Doom!"

"I never appear in one that is not, for a recognition or mistake might cost me my life."

"Now, Nick, I am glad you are here, for I wish to talk with you, and this is the disguise you will find me in when you come to see me, hereafter."

"I'll not mistake you next time, sir," with a smile.

"Unless I change my disguise, eh?"

"But can you go about as a clergyman, as you would wish to do? Is it a good character to work in?"

"Oh, yes, for my missionary duties will carry me to the slums of the city, while the stamp I bear of a minister will often protect me."

"Then, too, I can do much good in a quiet way, while serving as a detective, as well."

"So you can, sir, if you are so inclined. Plenty of that to do in Chicago."

"Well, Nick, what have you done, may I ask?"

"The boys all met me, sir, at our rendezvous, though it is dangerous for us, as

the police are shadowing us constantly, without the slightest cause."

"Well, let them do so, for it will be the better for the work you are to do for me as Boy Ferrets; you won't be suspected, you see, as being in my service."

"Oh, we don't mind, sir, for we are used to dodging the police. We rather enjoy the excitement."

"Well, as I understand it, you are yourself a waif, one who was well-born, but drifted apart from your kindred, and have been living the life of a young vagabond ever since."

"Well, Mr. Richardson, it is hardly as bad as that, for I am not a vagabond, and never have been."

"That is a name I used for comparison. I know that your gang have been a lot of rough and tough street urchins, whom you have tried hard to reform."

"Yes, sir; they are all true gamins."

"You are now willing to be one of my Boy Ferrets?"

"We are, sir, all of us."

"Can you trust them all?"

"With my life, sir."

"Is there not one that you suspect might prove treacherous?"

"Not one, sir, and it would be bad for him if he did play false. Chicago would be too hot to hold him."

"Glad to hear it; but now to business."

"Yes, sir."

"You especially, and your comrades, aided greatly in shadowing down Merton Sanford, and in truth, I owe more to you than I accomplished myself."

"Now, we proved that the girl, Estelle Enders, was beyond all doubt murdered and left in the boat, which did not drift upon Mr. Marlborough's shore front, but was taken there."

"The slip of paper found in her hand, the empty bottle of chloroform and saturated handkerchief, with her purse and jewelry untouched, proved suicide to all but you and I, and so we tracked down the maker of the boat, found to whom it had been sold, discovered that Giant Jack, whom you killed in self-defense, had been hired by Merton Sanford to steal the boat, thus destroying that link; then we ran our man to earth, and he is now behind iron-bars."

"Yes, sir."

"But it remains for us to prove the guilt of the man we accuse."

"It does, sir."

"And you and your boys are to go in with me and ferret out the mystery?"

"We are, sir."

"Then that settles the compact between us, Nick Norcross," and the detective grasped the boy's hand firmly.

CHAPTER V.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

THE compact between the detective and his young ally being settled, Dick Doom remarked:

"Now, Nick, I wish to say that you shall be under good pay yourself, and your Boy Ferrets shall also receive a fair salary, while anything that comes in the way of rewards will be equally divided among you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Doom—very generous, sir."

"Oh, no, only just; for though the police believe you and your band a bad lot, I have different views, gladly acknowledge the value of your services, and shall depend upon you for much aid."

"You go upon the principle, sir, of setting a thief to catch a thief," suggested Nick with a smile.

"Well, it is a good way to say the least of it; but in this case it is more serious than catching a thief, though I believe there is robbery as well as murder connected with the affair."

"I am sure of it, sir."

"We have Sanford safe, and yet there are others back of him to be found, and that can be done only by unearthing his antecedents and solving the mystery hanging about him."

"Though engaged to marry Miss Myrtle Marlborough, no one knows aught about him, not even her father, and for no apparent reason he takes the life of a young and beautiful girl, carrying her out upon the lake for that very purpose beyond all doubt, and then rowing the boat, with her body, to the very shore where dwelt the lady whom he intended to marry."

"He is certainly a finished villain, sir, if he is really the murderer, and a very daring one, too."

"Of that I have no doubt, Nick; but we must get at the motive for the deed. What was his purpose?"

"Now, his valet has disappeared most mysteriously, since the arrest of his master, and that would indicate that he was more than a servant, perhaps the partner in guilt of Merton Sanford."

"That would seem to be a correct inference, sir; but I will get to work with my Ferrets to work up the case, trying to find the valet. Is not that the first step to take?"

"Yes, that is your lay. Put out your spies at once, and now let me add I am only to be known to you, and to your Ferrets, as the Parson, Richard Richardson."

"I understand, sir."

"You will find me here at the hotel, and I will give you some cards, one of which will always gain you admission to see me at any hour, day or night."

"Thank you, sir."

"But you must change your quarters, or the police will hound you where you now are, I suppose."

"That we knew, sir, and have already decided upon a change."

"Where will you go?"

"You know, sir, that before Mr. Marlborough bought his house it was called the Haunted Manor."

"No, I did not know that, Nick."

"Yes, sir, it was an old mansion built on the lake-shore forty years ago. It belonged then to a rich gambler, and several murders were committed there."

"The gambler himself was shot one night, most mysteriously, and the place was vacant for a year or more when it was purchased by a retired sea captain who died there."

"Then an old servant left in charge was murdered one night and robbed."

"The place really has a bad name, then, I infer."

"It has indeed, sir, and no one would live there until Mr. Marlborough bought it, added to the house, improved the grounds and made it his home."

"Yes, and it was there that Sanford took the body of the murdered girl—there that the coachman of Mr. Marlborough was killed by Giant Jack the convict, and—"

"And there that I killed Giant Jack, sir."

"Yes, the place is still haunted, by the specters of tragic deeds at least, Nick."

"It is, sir, and being now nailed up and deserted by Mr. Marlborough, the people of all that neighborhood say that it is haunted and no one will go near it after nightfall, so I have decided to have our secret retreat there, sir, as we can reach it by boat, and by land from two directions."

"That is not a bad idea, Nick, for you will be undisturbed, if not seen going there," said Dick Doom thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK NORCROSS'S SUSPICIONS.

"THERE is every chance in our favor, sir," said Nick Norcross, in response to Dick Doom's remark about being seen going to and from the mansion the Boy Ferrets had decided upon as their retreat.

"You see, sir, there are long bulkheads on the lake-shore running in each direction which will conceal the approach of a boat from any one on the lake-front."

"Yes."

"Then in the bulkhead near the mansion, are several piles loose from the lower end, but fast at the top, and these can be drawn aside admitting a small boat into a space where half a dozen of equal size can be concealed."

"You have been investigating then, Nick?"

"Yes, sir, yesterday and last night I went all over the place."

"The stable stands over the open space in the bulkhead, and there is a trap there which we can enter and leave by, so that we can have our quarters up-stairs in the stable."

"And the mansion?"

"Is connected by a covered passageway with the stable, sir, that enters through the basement."

"But the house is locked up."

"Most thoroughly, sir, the windows having braces screwed across them, and the doors padlocked in addition to their regular locks."

"Was the house left furnished, Nick?"

"Completely, sir, even to the mantel ornaments and books."

"Then you have been in it?"

"Oh yes, sir, I unlocked the basement door and went through it."

"You must be careful not to disturb anything, Nick, for you and your men could be held then on a very serious charge."

"I know that well, Mr. Doom, and I shall be most careful; in fact shall not allow my Ferrets to enter the house, though, do you know, I firmly believe that some one does go there."

"Ah! perhaps one of the old servants who has the keys."

"No, sir, for Mr. Marlborough took the keys with him to Europe and said the house should not be opened until he was ready to pull it down and sell the land."

"Yet you think some one goes there?"

"I do, sir."

"Enters the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you think so, Nick?"

"Well, sir, I have been twice in the house, and some one certainly was there between my two visits, for I found doors open between the rooms which I had closed after me."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Maybe the ghosts are prowling around," said Dick Doom with a smile.

"Well, sir, ghosts or men in the flesh, I intend to know who they are, and so you can give me orders to watch the place, and that will protect me should the police pounce down upon me."

"A good idea, Nick, and I do give you such orders, while some night I will go up with you and have a look through the Haunted Mansion myself, for I have a curiosity to see a ghost."

"Maybe I can show you one, sir," said Nick with a smile, and then he added:

"Mr. Doom, I have a suspicion which I wish to make known to you, sir."

"All right, Nick, but just remember that I am not known as Dick Doom, but as Parson Richard Richardson."

"Yes, sir, I'll not make a mistake again about your name."

"Now to your suspicion?"

"Well, sir, I believe that Merton Sanford has a band of confederates in crime in this city."

"Ah! you are on the same track that I am, Nick."

"They may not know him, sir, as Merton Sanford, a society man, but I am sure that he had some underhand way of getting his money, and that it was through others who

worked for him, or rather robbed under his directions and leadership."

"Nick Norcross, you are a born detective, and I predict a great success for you in your new career, for you are mapping out the life of Merton Sanford just as I have read it."

"But now go and settle yourself and your Ferrets, and report to me to-morrow morning at eight."

"I will, sir," and the young Ferret took leave, while Dick Doom muttered as the door closed behind him:

"That boy has a brilliant future, or I misjudge him."

CHAPTER VII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

ALL was quiet in the city jail, though from without came the rumbling sound of wheels upon the stony streets.

It was after midnight and the lights burned dimly, casting grim shadows about the cells and corridors of the prison which startled the prisoner, who awakened from an uneasy slumber and beheld, as he believed, the form of some victim before him.

In Merton Sanford's cell all was quiet, and its occupant lay upon his cot, though neither undressed or asleep.

He was awaiting to see if the threat he had made to Scott Scofield, the officer over whom he held a deadly secret of the past, would have its effect.

"He dare not fail me," he muttered.

"If he does I will make the charge of murder against him, give my proofs of his guilt, and he will merely hang, as I shall at least have company in my misery."

"They can never prove my guilt, and it is only circumstantial evidence they have to confront me with; but can I disprove it, will be the question?"

"Curses upon that Dick Doom, for he was the one who brought me here, shadowed me to my destruction."

"But I will escape, I must, for I will not hang like a dog, and Scofield will see to it or hang with me—ah! I hear a step now."

Along the corridor in the dim light came a step and it halted before the cell of Merton Sanford.

The key creaked as it turned in the lock, and the hand that held it shook with fear.

But the iron door was opened and the form stepped in.

"You are here?"

"Yes, for I am not one to hang as you threatened."

"You were wise to come to my terms."

"Sh—do not talk, but act."

"Put this false beard on and these clothes I wear, for I have a suit over my own."

He took off the outer suit as he spoke, and handed the prisoner a beard and uniform cap with the clothes.

The prisoner hastily drew on the uniform over his own, put on the false beard and cap and said shortly:

"I am ready."

"You must go out alone."

"Why will you not go with me?"

"I dare not."

"Direct me then."

"Go down this corridor, turn to the left and go to the next turn to the right."

"This key will open the door for you, and you will find yourself in the office, where there will be a watch on duty."

"Do not speak to him unless he first addresses you, and if he does he will call you Officer Wilde."

"I understand."

"The beard, and your size and bearing will cause you to be mistaken for Wilde, who went home before twelve, as I took his extra watch for him."

"I see."

"Then cross the room, pass out of the center door and you will find yourself in the hallway where there is also a guard, to whom

you might say good-night in a low deep voice, for so Wilde speaks."

"Yes, I have noticed him."

"The guard will let you out into the street and you are free."

"Good!"

"But leave the key in the corridor door, for you have my pass-key."

"I will."

"I shall need it, for I, too, must leave here to-night."

"You must leave?"

"Certainly, for I have no desire to go into your cell for aiding you to escape."

"Give me an address where I can find you, and I will have you serve me?"

"No, to serve you would be to go to the bad, and I am not wicked, even though I did kill a man under strong provocation."

"I came here and have lived an honest life for three years, since we last met, Mr. Sanford, and I have laid up a couple of thousand dollars, which I will take with me and seek a home elsewhere, for I have no family."

"Now go, and be careful, for I have done for I can for you."

"Thank you, Scofield," and the prisoner held out his hand.

"No, I will not take your hand, for it is stained with the life-blood of a woman," and the officer drew back.

A curse came from the lips of the prisoner at the action of his guard, and quick as a flash he dealt him a stunning blow which sent him backward upon the cot.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE act of Officer Scofield maddened Merton Sanford when he refused to take his hand, and uttered the words that he did, and the resenting blow was so quickly given that there could be no resistance offered.

Not satisfied with having stunned the guard, or fearful, if he recovered consciousness, he would prevent his escape, Merton Sanford snatched the revolver from his belt and dealt him several severe blows with his own weapon.

There was a low moan, a drawing up of the limbs, and Officer Scofield's form became limp and still.

Then the desperate prisoner thrust the weapon into his own belt, drew open the coat of his victim and hastily searched his pockets, taking therefrom a large official envelope well filled with money.

"Two thousand," he said.

"Well, he will not need it," and with a suppressed laugh the prisoner turned to the cell door, opened it, and thrusting the key into his pocket, muttered grimly:

"I'll take this as a souvenir of my incarceration here."

Going along the corridor with light, yet unwavering tread, he turned to the left as directed, then kept on until he came to the turn to the right and halted at the massive door leading into the office.

He had the key given him by the unfortunate officer, and opened it without trouble.

He shaded his eyes as he stepped into the electric-lighted office, where he saw a man in uniform seated at a desk and writing.

The officer looked up as he saw the escaping prisoner enter and said:

"Ho, Wilde, I thought you had gone home."

"No, I was talking to Scofield—good-night," was the answer, and the prisoner spoke in a low voice without the slightest tremor in it.

"Good-night, Wilde," and the officer continued his work, while Sanford crossed the office, went to the middle door, turned the key in the lock and passed out into the corridor.

There he saw another officer seated by the outer door reading a paper.

"Good-night," said the prisoner with the

utmost calmness, and he passed through the door into the street, the guard giving him only a glance as he said with a sleepy yawn.

"Good-night, Officer Wilde."

Once out into the street and the escaping man walked leisurely along for several blocks, before he quickened his pace, and then at a brisk step he went toward the lake.

He kept on until he reached the lake front and crossing Michigan avenue he stood upon the wharf gazing out upon the lake.

Raising his cap and removing his false beard he stood for several minutes letting the cool air from the lake blow upon him, and then he muttered in a low, earnest tone:

"Free! yes, again I am a free man, and it will take more than even Dick Doom has proven himself, to get me again behind prison bars."

"Thanks to my Star of Luck, I was allowed to retain my valuables and so have my keys, and can enter my own house."

"I have little time to lose, however, for it will be daybreak within a couple of hours more, and I must be safely housed before the dawn reveals my escape."

"Now to seek my own quarters, where I sincerely hope that I will find all as I left it, though what has become of my faithful Buttons I do not know."

With this he replaced the false beard upon his face, put on his cap and walked rapidly away along Michigan avenue for a number of blocks, when he turned into a cross street and after going a short distance halted in front of a house fronting southward.

He had not shrunk from any one he had met, but before ascending the steps looked cautiously about him.

Then he stepped quickly up to the door, placed the pass-key in the lock and entered the house as though perfectly familiar with the place.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "EXTRA."

THE newsboys were lustily singing out "Extra!" in the streets beneath the windows of Dick Doom's room in the Leland Hotel, when his ears were attracted by the words:

"A murder committed in the jail!"

"Escape of the man who killed Estelle Enders!"

Dick Doom's calm mien changed for once, and he started for his hat, just as a quick knock came upon his door.

Opening it he found there Nick Norcross, who held an "Extra" in his hand and said:

"I have news for you, Parson Richardson."

The disguised detective quickly closed the door, threw himself into a seat and said:

"Sit down and read what it says, Nick, for I just heard a newsboy call out that Sanford had escaped."

"He has, sir, and the papers got out Extras as soon as it was known and I bought this one."

"Read it!"

The youth opened the paper and read aloud as follows:

"A MURDER IN THE PRISON!"

"OFFICER SCOTT SCOFIELD KILLED!"

"ESCAPE OF A MURDERER, WHO COMMITS MURDER TO ESCAPE!"

"Our readers will be shocked to learn that Merton Sanford, accused of the murder of Estelle Enders, a beautiful and unknown girl, has made his escape from prison by killing one of the best and most faithful officers of the guard, Scott Scofield."

"It is still fresh in the memory of all how a fancy row-boat was found one morning against the shore of Mr. Marlborough's elegant grounds upon the lake-side, and in it was discovered the body of a young and beauti-

ful girl whose identity has never been clearly established."

"Her jewelry and her purse had not been taken from her, and in her hand was a slip of paper, upon which was written in a feminine hand a statement that she took her own life and no one was to blame."

"There was a handkerchief saturated with chloroform, and a bottle which had held the drug found in the boat, and the form lay in perfect repose, as though only asleep."

"The unfortunate girl was buried by Mr. Marlborough, and the suicide was a nine-days' talk and then almost forgotten."

"But an efficient chief of the Secret Service had his ferrets at work on the case, and failing to secure proof that it was not a suicide, the famous detective known as Dick Doom, and who is a mystery himself, was called in, and after working for some time in the matter startled all by suddenly arresting a popular man about town, and who was soon to have wedded Miss Myrtle Marlborough."

"This man, Merton Sanford by name, no one seemed to know much of, popular though he was, and yet it was a shock to have Dick Doom accuse him of having murdered Estelle Enders."

"It was circumstantial evidence alone, and he was regarded as innocent, and though taken to prison was allowed better accommodations than the other prisoners, while he was permitted to retain his valuables and money."

"This morning when the relief guard went on duty the discovery was made that Officer Scofield was missing, and a search revealed the fact that he lay dead in the cell occupied by Merton Sanford, who had escaped."

"The head of the unfortunate officer had been fractured by several crushing blows, evidently given with his own revolver, which was missing, and doubtless appropriated by the prisoner, who must have called him into the cell on some pretext, perhaps feigning illness and then attacking him."

"It was known that Officer Scofield had drawn his pay that afternoon, but no money was found upon him; so the prisoner beyond doubt robbed his victim also."

"The guard in the office, and the night watch at the outer door, vow that no one passed out excepting Officer Wilde, to whom they spoke; but as there is a uniform and cap missing from the clothes press in the corridor, the prisoner must have put it on and thus disguised, passed out without being recognized, though both officers assert that he had a beard and was surely Officer Wilde."

"The latter officer however states that he left for his home at eleven o'clock, as he has a sick child, and officer Scofield went his rounds for him, and so the mystery remains to be solved of just how the daring and desperate prisoner made his escape, though now there will hardly be any who have proclaimed his innocence before, who will assert that he is not guilty, for the murder of poor Scofield brands him forever with guilt and will surely send him to the gallows."

"We sincerely hope that Detective Dick Doom will at once be telegraphed for and put on the murderer's track."

CHAPTER X.

UNCHAINING THE HOUNDS OF THE LAW.

WITHOUT any comment whatever, Dick Doom heard the Extra read through to the end, Nick reading well and distinctly.

The mention of his own name several times did not cause any change of color in his face, and when at last the article ended with the statement that it was hoped that he, Dick Doom, would be sent for to go upon the track of the escaped murderer, he said:

"Well, Nick, I guess I was not far wrong in the charge that Merton Sanford murdered Estelle Enders."

"No, sir, he certainly did so; but if he did not he took the life of Officer Scofield."

"Yes, that is a certainty."

"You do not think, sir, that the two officers on watch connived at his escape, do you?"

"Why do you think so, Nick?" asked Dick Doom thoughtfully.

"Well, Parson Richardson, as you say I must call you, it seems strange that the prisoner should pass out before two officers, neither of them together, and be mistaken for Wilde, whom I know, and who has a long beard, where Mr. Sanford is clean shaven."

"That has a suspicious look, Nick, and yet I deal so much in disguises myself, that it might be done, a false beard you know, making the difference, especially as the glance given the man, who would be in uniform, was but a casual one."

"Still it must be seen just what style of men those two officers are, for, if bribed to aid the prisoner in his escape, they are liable as accomplices in the murder of Scofield."

"Yes, sir."

"And that very thing clears them in my mind, for if they took a bribe to allow the prisoner to escape, they certainly would not have permitted the killing of poor Scofield."

"It would look that way, sir."

"Well, Nick, you go out and pick up all the information you can and get your boys to do the same work, reporting all to me to-night at eight o'clock."

"Should you fail to find me then, come at the same hour in the morning."

"I will now go around and see the chief," and just as Dick Doom was leaving his room a messenger arrived with a note for him.

It was from the chief and begged his immediate presence at the Secret Service Headquarters.

When Dick Doom sent in his card as the "Reverend Richard Richardson, of Indiana," he was at once admitted to the private office of the chief.

"Ah, Dick, I am glad to see you, for of course you know what has happened?"

"I just read the Extra, sir."

"What do you think of it?"

"Simply that Sanford knew that his guilt would be proven, and that his punishment for a second murder could be no greater than for one, so killed Officer Scofield to make his escape."

"He must be found."

"Certainly, chief, and I suppose you have your hounds of the law upon his track?"

"Yes, every man that I could spare."

"I will also begin work, sir, for I was already at work to prove him the murderer of Estelle Enders."

"Then I feel that you will run him down, Dick Doom, for you never fail; but I have placed the two officers of the watch under arrest as accessories."

"They are not guilty, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Had they been bribed to aid Sanford's escape they would never have allowed the murder of Scofield."

"By Jove, you are right, and both of those men I now recall were devoted to Scofield, who had saved the life of one of them, and nursed the other through a severe attack of illness."

"Yes, I shall order their release at once."

"It would be as well, sir, for they can be shadowed, and under the circumstances, Sanford made up as Officer Wilde, certainly they could not be blamed for mistaking the prisoner for him, coming as he did from the cells."

The chief touched a bell and ordered the two guards to be brought before him.

They soon appeared, and in irons, and the chief questioned them closely, Dick Doom

listening to every word, and also attentively watching their faces as they stood before him.

At last the detective handed to the chief a slip of paper which he had written something on, and the latter said:

"My men, at first suspicion was aroused against you, but that is dispelled now, and I will detach both of you from your present duty and set you to work to find the escaped prisoner."

"You are free now, and go your own way about removing suspicion from yourselves by finding this double murderer, Sanford."

The faces of the men brightened up, and they quickly departed upon their mission, and by noon scores of detectives and police officers by the hundred were searching for the murderer.

CHAPTER XI.

SURPRISED.

WHEN Merton Sanford entered his home, his hand dyed with the life of Officer Scofield, and a fugitive from his fellow-men, all there was dark and silent.

But he knew the place thoroughly and making his way to his library quickly turned the knob of the door.

What would he find there?

Would there be an officer in charge?

If so, he was ready for him, for he carried Scofield's revolver in his hand ready to take another life if need be.

He knew that if there was no one on watch at his home it would not be a safe place for him when daylight came and his escape was discovered, for naturally the detectives would come to look for some trace of him in the place that had been his home.

But he had a motive for going there, and that was to secure his money and valuables which he had hidden away in a secret hiding-place in his library.

He softly opened the door and started as he saw a dim light in the room.

"It comes from the street lamps," he muttered, and then he saw that the blinds were closed and the curtains drawn over them.

The light came from the rear room.

Cautiously he peered in, and having made no sound he knew that the one there did not suspect his presence, and that some one was there he was certain.

Stepping into the room he saw that the light came from a candle and it sat upon a chair, an ash-receiver serving as candlestick.

The light revealed a man upon his knees working at a panel in the wainscoting, as though striving to find a secret hiding-place there.

The man was so busily engaged with the instrument he was using to force open the panel that he did not hear the light tread of Sanford as he entered the other room and slowly advanced toward him.

Halting suddenly the eyes of the fugitive rested upon the form with a look of recognition and his lips almost uttered aloud the name.

"Buttons!"

But still the man kneeling on the floor did not heed the presence of another in the room, but went on with his work.

Nearer and nearer advanced the murderer now, each step more cautiously placed as he approached, and with his revolver half-raised as though to deliver a death-blow.

But suddenly Merton Sanford came to a very quick halt, and his upraised arm fell to his side, the revolver almost dropping from his grasp.

It was not that his presence had become known, it was at what his gaze had suddenly fallen upon.

There, in the rear of the man at work on his knees, lay the form of one who appeared to be lifeless.

It was the form of a rough-looking man,

with a bearded face, and that the life had left the body, the deathly pallor revealed, for the candle-light fell full down upon the upturned countenance.

Nor was this all, for across the pallid forehead was a deep, red gash, as from a blow with some heavy instrument.

Still in death lay the form, and by his side was a bag with a number of tools protruding from it.

This seemed to tell the story that the man was a burglar, had gone there to rob the house, and had been killed by the one who was so diligently working at the panel in the wall.

Merton Sanford stood as silent as a statue, gazing alternately upon the dead, upturned face, and the form of the workman.

His attitude was that of a man about to spring upon a foe, and his chest rose and fell convulsively, as though he was striving to gain perfect control of himself.

After a moment of silence he stepped closer to the working-man, and leveling his revolver at him, asked in a low, stern voice:

"Buttons, what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER XII.

BUTTONS.

A GROAN, rather than an exclamation of surprise and terror at being discovered, broke from the lips of the one whom Merton Sanford had called Buttons, when he heard the voice fall upon his ears.

He tried to spring to his feet, but his knees refused to support him, and half turning, he gazed with white, scared face at the intruder.

Seeing that there was no resistance to be offered, Merton Sanford advanced quickly, still keeping his revolver leveled, however, and said:

"Answer me, Buttons—what are you doing here, and robbing me?"

"Thank God that it is you, sir."

"I thought that the cops were upon us," gasped the man.

"Well, should they not be, when you are robbing me, and I have ever been so kind to you?"

"No, no, Mr. Sanford, I was not robbing you, sir, no, not that."

"Did I not catch you in the act?"

"Listen to me, sir, I beg of you."

"Well, what have you to say to defend yourself, Buttons?"

"I have to say, sir, that you were in prison, charged with the murder of a young girl, whom I do not believe you ever saw."

"But the cops were determined to hang you for it, and they searched your house and took all away they could, to make a case against you, sir."

"They searched for me as your man, but I eluded them."

"As I had no large sum of money of my own, sir, I determined to come here and get yours, and aid you to escape, to save you from the gallows, for you once saved my life, Mr. Sanford."

"I knew that you had a secret hiding-place for your money, and I suspected that it was in one of the panels of the wall, for I had seen you rise from before it several times when I came into the room."

"I saw in the papers that this property was sold, and was to be torn down as the ground was to have a large building put upon it."

"So I determined to make the search, and letting myself in with my pass-key, I entered the room to find—see, sir, see! that man at work here, just where I am," and Buttons shuddered as he pointed to the dead form lying near him.

"Well, Buttons?" asked Sanford sternly.

"I thought he was a cop, sir, and would have gone away, but he turned and saw me, and sprung upon me."

"I stood there, sir, near the fireplace, and seizing the poker, I gave him a blow that caused him to stagger back and fall."

"I went to him, Mr. Sanford, and I found that he was dead, for I had killed him."

"He had a revolver, sir, but had not dared to use it for fear the shot would bring the police, and those tools on the floor are his, as well as that bunch of false keys, and I made use of them, working where he had upon the panel."

"Who is he?"

"I only know, sir, that I saw him once before when he came to see the cook, and she must have told him you had valuables hidden here."

"And had you secured my treasure, Buttons, what then?"

"I would have used the money to aid your escape, sir; but I am so glad to see that they have set you free, Mr. Sanford."

"They did not set me free, Buttons."

"Ah, sir, did you escape?"

"Yes, and killed my keeper to do so, and we are both in the same box now."

"Ah, Mr. Sanford, what shall we do?"

"I will get my money and valuables, Buttons, and then we will get out of this with all haste and seek some hiding-place, for we will be hunted hard by those detective bloodhounds."

"Mr. Sanford, I can take you to the very place, sir," cried Buttons excitedly.

"Then let me get my gold and jewels, and we will start."

Ten minutes after the two fugitives left the house together, and walked rapidly away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

NICK LENDS A HAND.

THERE is an old saying that sorrow and trouble never come singly, and it is very true, and the same may be said of crime, for when a suicide or murder occurs, other tragedies appear to certainly follow in rapid succession.

It was these facts that caused the papers of Chicago to give large headlines referring to the "Carnival of Crime" existing in the city when the discovery was made that a murdered man had been found in the quarters of Merton Sanford.

Of course it was at once set down as the work of Sanford, who after his escape had gone to his house and found a burglar there robbing him, for the dead man was recognized by the police as one of the worst and most daring crooks in the city.

That he had been killed was a relief to the police, and yet his taking off was such that the cause and circumstances surrounding it must be unearthed.

The man who killed "Carl the Crook," as he was known, no one doubted as being other than Merton Sanford, and by catching him, a murderer and fugitive himself, all would be known.

The papers, as is generally the case, abused the Police Department and Secret Service Bureau, and urged that they were incompetent when they could not put an end to the epidemic of crime in the city.

The discovery of the dead crook in Merton Sanford's quarters was made by Dick Doom, who had gone from the quarters of the Secret Service Chief to the home of the fugitive, to note whether he had been there after his escape from prison.

Nick Norcross had accompanied him, and Dick Doom had known that, after the arrest of Sanford, the place had been locked up securely.

The two had discovered that the door had been opened, and entering by aid of his keys, Dick Doom at once beheld in the library the dead body of Carl the Crook.

Whether by design or not the secret panel in the wall had been left open by Sanford,

and the body of the dead man lay near it, with two or three burglar tools upon the floor by his side, while the evidence was there that the burglar had been trying to break into the retreat when discovered by the coming of Sanford after he left the prison.

Both Dick Doom and Nick carefully searched the place, and then the former went to the chief to make his report, promising to meet the young captain of the Boy Ferrets later at the Leland.

Having made his report to the chief, and requested that nothing be said of his presence in the city, and that he had discovered that Carl the Crook had been killed, Dick Doom went on to his rooms at the Leland.

He was seen to enter by Nick Norcross, who at once followed him, and was admitted to the detective's parlor.

"Sit down, Nick, and let us talk over this third killing by Sanford," said the detective.

"Yes, sir, he is leaving a red trail behind him, that is certain."

"He began with a woman, if that is his first murder, then killed Scofield, and now it is Carl the Crook, though the latter is no loss."

"But it shows just what he is capable of doing, and he went to his rooms to get his money from that secret hiding-place there."

"That would indicate, sir, that he intends to leave the city."

"No, I think not, for he would be safer here in disguise, and somehow I believe the man has reasons for wishing to remain in Chicago which are greater than his dread of capture."

"But we will talk it all over, Nick, and then you start your Ferrets to work to run him down, and I believe we can do it."

"We can at least try, sir, and I will start my boys out to-morrow, for we will be settled in our new quarters to-night," and an hour after Nick left Dick Doom confident of his success in the ultimate running down of Merton Sanford.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BURIAL OF A "CROOK."

THE body of Officer Scofield was borne to its last resting-place in the cemetery, followed by those who had been his friends in life and respected him for his many good qualities of heart.

His lips were forever silenced, and from them came no confession of what his past had been, no story of the secret he held locked in his bosom, and how, where no bribe of gold could have forced him to forfeit his duty, the threat of Merton Sanford to expose his past life and send him to the gallows had caused him to act and aid the prisoner to escape.

Not a soul suspected this secret, and honored by all, Scott Scofield was placed in his grave which kind friends strewed with flowers.

The body of Carl the Crook was also borne to the grave by those who loved him, for be a man ever so vile there is some one who has love for him, and a mother can never cast even a wicked son from her heart, can never wholly sever the tendrils of affection for a child.

"So, behind the coffin of the crook, who had gone astray early in boyhood, followed the mother who loved and forgave him, her tears as sincere as though he had spent a noble life."

Many a time had she pleaded with him to reform, and prayed that he might mend his evil ways, but all in vain.

So the mother followed his dead body, unmindful of the dishonor he had brought upon her, and a few sympathetic friends accompanied her.

Popular among those of the crook fraternity, Carl Creswood also had other mourners, those who had not dared ride in

carriages, for fear of the police, but who had hied across the fields one by one to reach the burying-place, slipping up to pay a last tribute to their friend, as cautiously as though they were seeking to kill or to rob.

Here and there as they came along a few wild flowers would be gathered by one; another, with the ruling passion still strong, would steal from a newly made grave a withering bouquet, or tear from a lot a few fine roses and other flowers, to place over the body of the one they respected, though Carl the Crook.

Known to each other, a warning signal had been agreed upon, to be given should a policeman appear, and cautious, anxious glances were cast about for any one who might look suspicious, appear as a "wolf in sheep's clothing" as they regarded the officers of the law.

In a retired spot of the cemetery was the humble burial lot of the mourning mother, who placed the body of her erring son near the ashes of her husband and other children who had gone before.

A brother of Carl the Crook, who had lived an upright life, was not ashamed to accompany his mother and console her in her sorrow, and a few real friends also were there, and who could not but cast strange glances at the curious throng of several score crooks who stood near with uncovered heads, solemn, sorrowing, and anxious for their safety.

A strange, motley throng it was, with crime-hardened faces, dissipation stamping their features, and the power to do much evil, cause much unhappiness in the world.

In the midst of the gathering was one whose clerical garb and benign expression caused all to believe him to be the clergyman.

As no clergyman had come with the body, and the eyes of the mourning mother fell upon the clerical-looking stranger, she stepped toward him and said pleadingly:

"Oh, sir, will you recite the burial service over my poor boy, wicked though he was, for, as a minister, you can but forgive the erring ones, though my own pastor refused to come to the grave of my unfortunate Carl."

The face of the stranger flushed at the pleading words, then it turned pale, but amid the deathlike silence, he responded:

"Yes, madam, I will not refuse."

Removing his hat, with no book to guide him, in a voice melodious in tone and sympathetic, the stranger recited passages of the burial service, while all stood about him in respectful silence.

The hymn, "I would not live alway," was then sung, the stranger's fine voice leading, and the assembled crooks joined in. Then the body was lowered into the grave, while the sobbing mother said as she turned away:

"I thank you, sir, and may Heaven bless you."

The stranger bowed and walked away, muttering to himself:

"I never witnessed a more solemn scene than the burial of that unfortunate man, Carl the Crook."

The clerical stranger, as the reader has doubtless surmised, was *Dick Doom, the Detective!*

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTURED.

OVER the waters of the lake, creeping along out of the range of the glare of light from the city, a boat was working its way, propelled by four oars, and with another one in tow ten feet astern.

The boats had been rowed by one man to a point on the river which at night was secluded and deserted, save for an occasional patrol going his rounds to see that all was well.

There, lying against the dock the occupant of one of the boats had remained in hiding until he saw a form approaching.

A long, low whistle passed his lips, as a signal, while he stood ready to seize his oars and row rapidly away should the response not be what he wished.

But the signal was answered just as given, and a moment after the form halted at the dock and tossed a bundle that he carried down into the rear boat.

"I'm the first one so far, Pete," he cried.

"Yes, you is Number One, Jake, but t'others will be along soon, and I don't care how soon, for I'd hate to be nabbed by ther cops for being here."

"Here comes some one now," said Jake, and Pete Pepper at once gave the signal.

It was answered as before and a boy came up, also carrying a bundle, which he lowered into the boat.

"Well, Dot, is ther t'others coming soon?" asked Pete Pepper.

"You bet, if ther cops don't run 'em off."

Just then a third form was seen approaching, the signal was given and answered, and Jake said:

"It's Kid."

"Kid" also carried a bundle that was placed in the boat, and next "Bricktop," "Denny," "Tricks," and others, all carrying burdens of some kind which found a place in the boat that was in tow, and into which two of the mysterious young fellows got, one to steer and the other to make more room for the oarsmen that were to row.

"We is all here but Cap'n Nick," said Jake as he glanced over the crowd and counted twelve present.

"Yas, but he'll tarn up soon," Dot answered.

"Ther cap'n is mighty prompt always, so I hopes nothin' has happened to him," Pete Pepper remarked.

"You knows the place we is goin' to, Pete, if ther cap'n don't turn up?" asked Tricks.

"Yes, but he'll be here onless he has been fished."

"There he comes now," was whispered.

"Boys, thar is two of 'em."

"So there be; lie low all."

"Better give ther signal and see."

The signal was given and promptly answered, and the two forms came nearer and nearer.

As they drew closer it was seen that one was their captain, Nick Norcross, but the other was a large man and in uniform.

"Lordy! it's a cop."

"Pink him!"

"No, Nick knows what he is about, pards."

"What is he bringing a cop with him for?"

"Maybe it's Dick Doom, the man we is to serve."

The twelve boys were now standing up in the boats, their eyes on a level with the wharf and their heads looking like a row of crows.

All were anxious and their eyes riveted upon the two who were approaching, one of whom was certainly their young leader, Nick Norcross.

As they came within ten feet of the end of the wharf Nick Norcross made a quick move, and a revolver was thrust into the face of the one with him, and the young Ferrets all heard the stern words:

"Hands up, sir, or you are a dead man!"

"Obey, and we'll do you no harm!"

That the officer was taken wholly by surprise there was not the slightest doubt, and he was fairly caught, for with a cocked revolver thrust into his face, and a dozen daring youths suddenly surrounding him, he was at the mercy of his captors and could only say:

"I surrender! Don't kill me!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FERRETS.

CAUGHT as he was, and not knowing but that he was in instant danger of death, the position of the policeman was anything but an enviable one.

He was surrounded by what appeared to be to him a desperate lot of young criminals, and he submitted quietly to having his weapons and club taken from him, while a pair of handcuffs found in his pocket were placed upon his wrists.

"Got a rope there, Pete?" asked Nick Norcross.

"Yas, here it is, Cap'n Nick," and a stout rope was handed up from the boat.

"Officer, as I said, we mean you no harm, unless you attempt to betray our presence here.

"I shall gag and bind you, leaving you here to be found by the next cop on his rounds."

"It won't be until daylight, cuss yer."

"I am sorry on your account, but glad on ours."

"Here, sit down by this hawser post."

"You is ther River Rats, ther worst gang of young cut-throats in Chicago; and that's sayin' a heap!"

"That is your opinion, Cap, but we may not be such cut-throats as you think."

"Open your mouth, please."

"What for?"

"The end of your club, for I intend to gag you with it."

With an oath the officer obeyed, and the end of the club was thrust into his mouth, and tied there, making a secure gag.

He was then bound securely in a sitting position with his back to the post, and Nick Norcross said:

"You will be safe now, Mr. Cop, until you are relieved."

"Just say that the River Rats did the work, and in the morning hunt up what we have done in the way of killing, burglary or robbing hen-roosts, for we are a bad lot, you know."

"Good-night," and with a word to his comrades Nick Norcross sprung into the boat and took the tiller, the others clambering down after him.

"Give way, boys," he called out, and the four oarsmen set to work and pulled steadily away from the dock, straight out into the lake, the other boat towing astern.

"How did you find the cop, Cap'n Nick?" asked one of the boys as they rowed along.

"Oh, I saw that he was watching for me, and so I decided to play a bold game, knowing I could not shake him."

"I went up to him and said that there were several men in a boat at the end of the dock and we could see if they were not up to some deviltry."

"I also told him that I was a detective, and when I heard your signal I answered it, determined to take him prisoner when I was near enough for you to help me."

"And you did it in great shape, Cap'n Nick; but where are we going now?"

"To our new hiding-place."

"Did you bring the bed and the provisions I told you to get?"

"Yes, we got just what you told us; but where is the new dive?"

"In the stable of the Marlborough Mansion."

"Whew!"

"They say it's haunted, Nick."

"Well, we don't mind ghosts."

"I has heerd strange stories told of that place, Nick, and folks says you can't git any one to take charge of the mansion for love or money, and it's all locked up."

"So much the better for us, boys, for we will be safe."

"But the stable is built over the dock, and there is a place among the piles at the bulkhead where we can get in with our

boats and can go up through a trap into one of the stalls."

"We can darken the windows up-stairs so no light can be seen there at night, and we'll be perfectly safe, while if any cops should attempt to enter the stable, before they could break in we could get down into our boats and skip out."

"I tell you, fellows, it is the very place for us," said Nick with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FERRETS AT HOME.

FAR out into the lake went the Boy Ferrets with their boats, for they were anxious not to be seen, and only after they had left the busy streets behind them did Nick Norcross turn the prow shoreward.

The part of the city he headed for was a secluded locality upon the lake-shore, where there were a few residences of the better classes, who were able to indulge in the luxury of a home near the water.

The most elegant of these residences was situated upon a point, where the water was deep, and which was protected by wooden bulkheads filled with heavy stones.

The grounds occupied several acres, and were beautifully ornamented with trees and shrubbery, while the mansion was large and massive in structure, and the buildings correspondingly commodious.

But there was no light in the house, all was dark and dreary, and the nearest residence to it was several hundred yards distant.

The place was the one known as the Haunted Mansion, and was the property of millionaire Marlborough, who had deserted his home and gone abroad, after the blow that had fallen upon his daughter from the arrest of the man she had expected to marry, as the murderer of Estelle Enders.

It was toward this dark pile that Nick Norcross headed his boat, and he guided it straight in to the bulkhead, where there were several of the piles, hung with chains, that were loose at the bottom and could be moved.

Strong hands soon moved these aside, and the boats were drawn in under the dock and made fast.

Then Nick Norcross, who seemed to be well acquainted with the surroundings, felt his way along until he came to a place where he pushed on the flooring overhead and it yielded to his strength.

"Here is the trap, boys, and I'll go up first," he said.

This he did, and soon the others followed him and the bundles were taken up one by one.

"The blinds are closed, but we will cover the windows so that no light can be seen through," said Nick, and they followed him in the darkness up-stairs, each holding to the other's hand.

The windows were soon covered with thick canvas and then a light was struck and a lamp lit.

They were in the second story of the stable, and there was a large loft there and two rooms leading off from it and looking out upon the lake.

"We could jump from these windows into the lake, if it came to being cornered," said Nick, and then he set about making things comfortable.

One room was fairly well furnished, and the other had only a cot in it; but Nick was given the cot and the others spread their blankets along on the floor.

In one room there was a fireplace, and a pile of wood was in the loft, so that Nick said they could cook at night, when the smoke would not be seen, and they would not fare badly by any means.

So while Nick slipped out upon a reconnoitering tour, a voyage of discovery, as he said, Pete Pepper and one of the others got

out the bags of provisions and began to prepare a late supper.

When Nick returned half an hour after his face wore a very serious look, but he made no reply to the questions asked, if he had seen a ghost, and ate his supper in silence.

Then he said:

"Boys, you all know that I have engaged with Dick Doom, the great detective, for us to serve him as Boy Ferrets, and this place is to be our retreat."

"Six of you are to go on duty by day, and six by night, and we can come here either by land or water, and I will show you how to get in and out by the trap-door overlooking the lake, and thence along a sill to the corner of the stable, or by the floor trap down into the boats."

"Those who go on duty at night, must not leave until after dark, and then depart singly, if you meet elsewhere, and return before daylight."

"Those who do duty by day must leave before dawn and return after dark, and the party remaining here must not talk in a loud tone and be always watchful for any one coming near, though I do not expect many visitors here, as the place is much dreaded."

"Still the police might be prowling about and we must not be found here."

"The first duty you are to do is to find some trace of Merton Sanford, and there is to be a large reward offered for his capture, so try and get it."

"When other duty is cut out for you I will let you know."

"Now let us get what rest we can," and throwing himself upon his cot Nick Norcross was soon fast asleep, the other Ferrets quickly following his example.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NICK RISES TO EXPLAIN.

THE Boy Ferrets, who were to go on duty by day, led by Nick Norcross, slipped out of their retreat before dawn.

They cast an ominous glance at the dark mansion as they glided by, but once they had reached the streets beyond, breathed more freely, for it must be confessed that they were impressed by the weird stories they had heard of the place being haunted.

Giving them a rendezvous down in the city where they could meet him, or leave a note, if they made any discovery that was urgent, Nick Norcross made his way alone to the old haunts he had known so well, and hung about to learn if there had been any discovery of the bound and gagged officer being found.

He was not long in making the discovery that something was going on down on the dock of an exciting nature, for he saw a Patrol wagon drive rapidly there with half a dozen police in it.

Nick had changed his usual costume to that of a sailor boy, and he did not fear recognition, so stood calmly while the police wagon dashed along with the officer in it whom he had so securely bound and gagged.

He saw that the officer was being supported by two of his companions and the dread came over him that he had been hurt in some way.

So he ate his breakfast in a restaurant near by, and heard it told by several how a policeman had been found gagged and bound upon the pier, but could not speak to tell who had thus served him.

"Is he badly hurt, sir?" asked Nick of the night-watchman who was telling the story.

"Oh, no, I guess not, only cramped from being tied so tight, and his throat sore from the gag in his mouth."

"He'll come 'round all right."

Nick gave a sigh of relief, and asked:

"Don't they know who did it?"

"I believe the officer was just able to say he had been set upon by the River Rats."

"The worst gang o' young fellers in this here town," said one.

"That's so, and every one of 'em will stretch rope yet," another remarked.

"And they deserve to, for they do say them young River Rats kills as well as robs folks."

Nick did not care to hear more, for the conversation was getting too personal to please him, and it was evident that the River Rats had no friends in that crowd.

So he paid for his half-eaten breakfast and got out.

He made his way at once to the Leland Hotel and sent up one of the cards given him to the "Reverend Richardson," and was at once admitted.

"Well, Nick, I was going to look you up, for I just received a note from the chief."

"Yes, sir."

"Here it is, and it concerns you."

"Indeed, sir?"

"I'll read it," and taking up a letter from the table, which had come a few minutes before by special messenger, Dick Doom read:

"I desire to inform you that the River Rats, whom you made yourself responsible for, were up to more deviltry last night, for they captured, bound and gagged one of my best officers, and left him thus until he was discovered at six o'clock this morning."

"They went off in a boat somewhere, and though no report has yet been received of what they were guilty of, I will doubtless soon learn."

"Please come around and see me as soon as you can do so."

"Well, Nick, what have you to say to this charge?" asked Dick Doom quietly, when he had finished the letter.

"It is true, sir."

"True that you are making war upon the police, after you have entered my service as Ferrets?"

"I'll explain the situation, sir, and you will see that it could not be helped, for the officer discovered me, and I could only do as I did, though I did not wish to harm him."

Then Nick explained just how it happened, and Dick Doom said with a smile:

"Well, Nick, I think you have had your revenge upon at least one of the police: but I cannot blame you, and I'll square you with the chief."

"Now wait here until I return," and Dick Doom started for Headquarters.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK DOOM DEFENDS HIS FERRETS.

THE chief listened most attentively to Dick Doom's defense of his boy allies, and said:

"Well, Dick, I will have to accept your apology for those young ruffians; but I cannot believe with you that they are sincere in their reformation."

"They are a hard lot and I do not believe any good can come from your protecting them."

"At least give me a fair trial with them, chief."

"I will do that; but what do you expect to accomplish?"

"In the first place their reformation, if they are all that the police assert they are, but which I doubt most decidedly."

"And then?"

"Well, sir, as one who was a boy detective myself, I know the value of having such allies."

"As newsboys, bootblacks and messengers, they go everywhere and see everybody, while they keep their eyes and ears open."

"They have associated with the worst characters, I grant, and they will, therefore, be the better able to find the very ones whom the police cannot get possession of."

"But, my detectives will do what the police can not."

"Perhaps, sir, and yet it took my Boy Ferrets to unearth the murderer of that poor

girl, and I believe I can yet track him now through them."

"If you do I'll never say another word against your Ferrets, Dick; but, they must let my officers alone or they will get into serious trouble."

"They will, sir, but this was a case where they had to act in self-defense, for they were seeking a more secure hiding-place, where the police would not constantly hound them."

"Would it not be better if the police and my detectives knew that they were really acting as ferrets?"

"I think not, sir, for more good can be accomplished as it is; but what did the officer say of their capturing him?"

"He is very sore over it, of course; but he said he was most cleverly caught, and though they did not intentionally hurt him, they bound and gagged him in a way that was far from pleasant, and he threatens to yet be at the hanging of every mother's son of them."

Dick Doom laughed at this, and replied:

"Well, chief, I believe my Boy Ferrets are in a fair way to dodge the hangmen themselves, and to bring others to the gallows; at least I have that confidence in them."

"Well, that is saying a great deal, Dick, for you are the best detective I ever knew, and I have more confidence in you than any one else, for your actions, not your words, have proven what you are."

"You are very kind, chief, and I ask of you patience for awhile, on my own account, for my Boy Ferrets."

"You shall have it, Dick Doom, and all the assistance and influence I can extend you."

"But have you yet heard anything of the fugitive, Sanford?"

"Not a word, sir, and I have not been idle either."

"I fear that he has left the city."

"I cannot believe it, sir; but I have a request to make of you."

"It is granted beforehand, Dick."

"You have put a number of your men upon the track of Sanford?"

"Yes."

"There is a reward offered for him?"

"There will be ten thousand offered for him."

"Well, sir, my request is that you let my Boy Ferrets and myself work up this case, and withdraw all your men."

"Indeed?"

"If I find this man Sanford, I will divide the reward equally among your detectives, and if my Ferrets discover him, then the reward goes to them."

"That is fair enough, Dick, certainly."

"I have every hope of finding the man, chief, for I cannot believe that he has left the city, and in the search for him I wish my Boy Ferrets to do their share, and I promise you that you will have a band of Secret Service men you can rely upon, young as they are."

"If they were not such a hard lot, Dick."

"The police accuse them of every crime they cannot find the perpetrator of, yet not once has one of them been captured and proven guilty, and I will frankly tell you that I am watching them closely, shadowing them day and night, and I will vouch for them thus far."

"Well, I will accept your guarantee, Dick, and I confess just such a band of boy detectives, when I know they can be relied on, will be just what I need as allies," said the chief, and he added:

"So I leave it for you to make them what I wish."

CHAPTER XX.

NICK MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE Boy Ferrets who had started out upon their day's work, had been anxious to be

able to go in with some report of value to their young captain.

They felt proud in feeling that they been trusted by the famous Dick Doom, and taken into his service, and they wished to prove themselves worthy of it.

So they set to work with a will, and went hither and thither in their desire to obtain some clue to the fugitive murderer, Merton Sanford.

When night drew near, having separated, they started for their retreat in the stable of the Marlborough Mansion, having learned what information they could.

They went one by one and reached their retreat without having attracted any attention to their movements.

The others were there, just ready to start upon their night work, and yet their young leader had not returned.

The others however understood their duty and started out soon after the coming in of the day watch, as those had been out all day were called.

An hour passed before Nick Norcross arrived, and as he entered the stable those there saw that he wore a very serious air.

Something evidently worried him, and yet he did not make mention of what it was.

After awhile, as the boys began to take to their blankets for a night's rest, Nick Norcross arose, put a candle and some matches in his pocket, and taking a revolver and bull's eye lantern, quietly slipped out of the room and made his way down to the floor below.

"I wish I had Pete Pepper with me; but I will go alone as he is off on duty to-night," he muttered, referring to his firm stand-by and particular chum who had been his room-mate.

Nick had evidently made up his mind to go alone on some mission, and leaving the stable by way of the sill, he wound his way cautiously around to the grounds.

All was dark and lonely there, and a chill wind was coming off of the lake.

Crossing the yard he went to the cellar door which was made fast by a padlock.

With a bundle of false keys, which he took from his pocket, he opened the door, and descended into the midnight darkness of the cellar, closing the way behind him.

He took his bull's-eye lantern then and lighted his way across the cellar until he came to a door which was at the foot of a stairway leading to the floor above.

The door was locked, but the key had been removed from the lock, and one of his false keys opened it for him after several trials.

Leaving the door unlocked behind him he ascended the cellar stairs to a door on the next floor, and which he also found locked.

But it yielded, as the other locks had done, to his bunch of magic keys and he found himself in a large rear hallway, opening into the kitchen on one side, the pantries on the other and a balcony upon the rear of the mansion.

The one who had closed the mansion, had appeared to seek greater security against entrance from outsiders, by locking all of the room and hall doors, and taking out the keys, and this very circumstance enabled Nick Norcross to make his way where he pleased with his keys.

He passed through the lower floor, from room to room, guided by his dark-lantern, and ascending the massive front stairway found himself in a large hall shaped like a cross.

At one end, the one toward the lake, was a cozy sitting-room, and opening the door leading into it, Nick started back at the sight that met his gaze, and his lantern nearly dropped from his hand.

What Nick saw was a pleasant room, well-furnished, with the ornaments upon the mantel, and a window looking out into a

conservatory from which the plants and flowers had been taken.

But that was not what surprised Nick the Ferret most, which fairly startled him, but that he beheld burning in the fire-place a wood fire, and before which a lounge had been drawn.

The fire had burned low, but it proved most conclusively that some one lived in the house in spite of its being believed to be deserted.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WEIRD VISITOR.

NICK NORCROSS was no coward.

In fact he was as utterly fearless in his nature as one could wish to be, and he had an iron nerve and always kept his presence of mind under the most trying ordeals.

He saw that there was a dweller in the mansion, or had been, notwithstanding that it was securely closed, no one was supposed to dwell there, and the place was avoided as a house with a mystery, a superstitious dread by many that the place was haunted, presumably by those who had lost their lives in the past.

What had worried Nick the night before, when he first took his Ferrets into the stable, was the fact of his seeing a light flash from an upper window in the mansion.

It was quickly gone, and darkness reigned again, but Nick knew that he was not mistaken.

He had surely seen a light.

He would not tell his comrades, for fear of a stampede; but he made up his mind that he would investigate for himself.

So he entered the mansion to see what that light meant.

In the upper rear room, opening into the conservatory, by a window, he found a fire smoldering upon the hearth.

Where was the one who had built that fire?

Why had it been built?

These questions could only be satisfactorily answered by Nick's making a search of the mansion.

Whoever dwelt there was certainly doing so secretly.

No watchman would thus be in charge of the house, and Nick had discovered that no one had been placed to guard it, and felt that the one whose presence there was revealed by the fire, was secretly hiding from some crime.

Whatever the cause he certainly dreaded the result of being discovered more than he did the weird stories told of the place being haunted.

"Well, I guess I'll go on a cruise through the old mansion," said Nick, personal danger not being taken into consideration.

He felt that there was only one there, and if he met him they were about on equal terms.

But suddenly Nick thought that he might run into an ambush, and taken at a disadvantage the result would doubtless be fatal to him.

"No, if he has not left the mansion, he will return here, and if he has skipped out, he will come back, so here is the place to wait for him.

"I will wait just here, and I am mighty glad I left the doors locked as I found them.

"I'll sit here on the lounge, for when he comes into the door there, I will be behind him, and thus hold him up, if I don't scare him to death, for he may take me for a ghost."

With a grim smile at this, Nick threw a couple of logs upon the fire, to give him plenty of light, and seated himself upon the lounge with his back to the conservatory window.

Seated there, gazing into the firelight, his eyes became heavy, and he dropped off into a comfortable sleep.

How long he slept he did not know, but while dreaming peacefully, unmindful of where he was, there came to his ears a low, strange sound.

It was at first low and like unto a moan, as from the lips of one in pain.

It grew louder and louder, as the sleeping youth slumbered quietly on, until at last it ended in a shriek.

It was such a shriek as might come from a lost soul, and it pierced the ears of Nick Norcross, arousing him with a startled exclamation.

Springing to his feet he gazed about him an instant, trying to recall himself.

As he did so, and had come to the conclusion that he had had a bad dream, again came a low groan.

It came from the window behind him, and turning quickly Nick Norcross beheld there a white-robed form, with outstretched hand, face covered and most ghastly looking.

Quick as a flash the young Ferret snatched his revolver, leveled and fired it, the ball crashing through the glass.

But the ghostly form did not move, and only a low groan came from the lips of the weird visitor.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FATAL SHOT.

THE shot fired by Nick Norcross rung through the deserted house, as well as the crashing sound of the glass broken by the bullet.

But to Nick's almost dismay the white form remained standing before him, though at the shot it had stepped back a couple of paces.

Nick had not fired to kill, nor to even hit the form, simply to startle the one who had appeared before him like an apparition from the grave.

The bullet had sped over the muffled head, and thus the weird form and the boy stood facing each other through the window.

It was evident that whoever was playing ghost was desirous of frightening the youth, for the arm still remained outstretched, the form still stood erect and silent.

Nick Norcross was a dead shot, for he had used firearms a great deal, and prided himself upon his skill as a marksman.

He felt a trifle unnerved now, when facing that white, silent form, and yet believed that he could bring it down with a shot.

But who was it that dared risk life thus by facing him, after having seen that he was armed and would shoot?

It was this daring that took the youth aback, and he was slightly startled to see the form silently glide away.

He did not wish to fire again, and yet did not care to see the spectral figure escape from him.

So he sprung to the window and attempted to raise it, to follow, but in vain.

He could not move it.

Then he ran to the door opening into the conservatory.

It was locked, and he hastily sought for a key on his bunch with which to open it.

Just as the key fitted the lock he heard a sound behind him, and turning quickly beheld the hall door open and coming into the room was the same weird form clad in white.

Nick was cornered, he was compelled to admit, and he quickly drew his revolver once more.

The form advanced toward him now, with both hands extended, the robe covering over the hands and hiding them.

It was certainly enough to strike terror to even a brave heart, yet Nick Norcross did not flinch but called out.

"Halt, or I fire, and fire to kill!"

Hardly had the words left his lips when, from one of the robe-covered hands there came a puff of smoke and sharp report, and

a bullet buried itself in the door just over Nick's head.

Almost on the instant he returned the fire, and with a cry of anguish the spectral form sunk heavily upon the floor.

"My God! this is terrible!" cried Nick, as he sprung to the side of the writhing form.

As he did so he heard footsteps without in the upper hall, and they were moving rapidly.

Believing that he was to be attacked by some one else who was in the house, Nick Norcross sprung to one side of the door and stood at bay, his revolver in hand.

But the steps were not coming toward the room, but died away from hearing at the other end of the long corridor.

Then Nick turned to the groaning, writhing form upon the floor and drew from his face the white sheet that enveloped it.

One glance into the anguish-tortured face, now as white as death, and Nick Norcross recognized it, for he said:

"You are Buttons?"

"Yes."

"The valet of Merton Sanford?"

"Yes, and you have given me my death wound."

"I hope not."

"I know, I am dying."

"No, I will seek a physician—"

"And betray all—no, no, no man can save me now, so let me die—oh God! how that bullet burns my vitals!" and his groans caused the sweat to come out like beads upon the face of Nick Norcross, who said:

"What were you doing here?"

"Hiding from the law."

"And Sanford?"

"Was with me; but he has escaped and you can never find him now, for he does not stay here, only came to-night to visit me."

"Do you believe you are going to die?"

"I know it."

"Then why not confess your crimes, and where Sanford is?"

"Never! I will never betray him."

"I do not believe your wound is fatal and I will seek aid," and with a bound Nick was gone from the room, and hastily he retreated by the way he had entered the mansion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STORY TOLD.

ONCE he had left the house Nick Norcross paused, as though undecided whether to go alone, or to call up his Ferrets asleep in the stable.

He decided to go alone, and to row down the lake to the Deland and report to Dick Doom just what had occurred.

It took but a short while to get the boat out, the same light craft in which the body of Estelle Enders had been found.

Nick was a fine oarsman and possessed great strength and endurance as well, and he sent the light boat flying over the waters, and the pace he kept up brought him to the wharf near the hotel in less than an hour.

He at once went to the office and said that it was important for him to see the Reverend Mr. Richardson, and a boy showed him up to the room.

A light was burning within and a knock brought a prompt response to come in.

Entering the room Nick found the detective still up, and looking over some papers.

He showed no surprise at the late call of the youth, but greeting him pleasantly asked:

"Well, Nick, any news?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down and tell me about it."

"I wish you to go with me at once, sir, and I can tell you on the way."

"Put on your great-coat, for we go on the lake, and it would be well to have you send a messenger to Headquarters for the police surgeon to meet you at a certain point, in case you needed him, and if not he could return and not have to know why you wanted him."

"Well, Nick, you are all business, I see, and I will do just what you wish, but where shall I have the surgeon meet us?"

"At Cornell avenue, sir, and say, fifty-fourth street, for that will be near enough, if he is needed, to soon fetch him."

Dick Doom hastily wrote a few lines, rung for a messenger and sent him with a note to Police Headquarters.

A moment after he was ready to go with Nick Norcross, and leaving the hotel the latter led the way to the wharf where he had left his boat.

They at once sprung in, Nick seized the oars, and the boat was now on its return to the Marlborough Mansion, Nick pulling the same strong, quick stroke which had brought him to the hotel in such good time.

As he rowed along he said:

"It seems, Mr. Doom—"

"Parson, you know, Nick."

"Oh yes, sir, I forgot."

"I mean that it seems, Parson Richardson, that my destiny is to have to kill my fellow-beings."

"Ah! you have had a shooting scrape there to-night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who with?"

"A ghost."

"Indeed!"

"Tell me of it?"

"Well, sir, it was in the Marlborough Mansion, for you know where I told you our retreat was?"

"Yes."

"I saw a light in the mansion the night before, and to-night went on a voyage of discovery to see what it meant."

"Who went with you?"

"I went alone, sir."

"You are a plucky fellow, Nick."

"I did not see anything to be afraid of, and I thought it best to go alone."

"And the house was haunted?"

"Yes, sir."

"By a ghost?"

"By a man who was playing ghost, or rather two men, for one escaped."

"Ah! and the other?"

"I shot him."

"Killed him?"

"I wounded him, he said mortally, but I hope not, and I came for you as the best thing to do."

"That was right; but who was the man?"

"The one I wounded, sir, was Sanford's valet, Buttons, and the one who escaped was the man we are in search of," was Nick's impressive response.

Then Nick told the story of his adventure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOOKING FOR CLUES.

DICK DOOM listened with the deepest attention to the story of Nick's adventure, and made a comment only now and then.

Reaching the hiding-place of the boat, Nick put it away under the wharf, and Dick Doom followed up through the trap into the stable and then around by the narrow walk to the grounds.

In the stable all was still, showing that the Ferrets, all unconscious of what was going on, were sleeping soundly.

Leading the way to the mansion, as he had gone before, Nick opened the outer door and entered by the cellar-way.

He had not locked the door in his retreat, but went on, his lantern in hand, for he had left it in the cellar to await his return.

Dick Doom followed in silence, and at

last they reached the door where the tragedy had happened.

Here Nick paused, with his hand upon the knob, and he drew a long breath as though to prepare himself for the sight within:

Would he find the man still writhing in the anguish his wound gave him, or would he find him dead?

But, as Dick Doom made no motion to enter, uttered no word, Nick opened the door quietly and slipped within.

The detective followed close at his heels.

The fire was still burning, but not brightly as before.

But there was light enough for both to see the form lying upon the floor.

Nick slightly shuddered, while Dick Doom stepped forward, drew aside the white sheets which still enveloped the form, and placed his hand upon the upturned face.

"Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no need of the surgeon."

"He is dead, sir."

"Yes."

"I am sorry; but what is to be done, sir?"

"I made myself responsible for your appearance, when needed, in the case of the killing of Giant Jack in the grounds of this mansion, the night you came to take the boat, and I will still be responsible for you."

"Thank you, sir."

"I do not wish the body of this man taken to Headquarters yet, or his death reported."

"You know best."

"We will leave the body here until to-morrow night, when it can be buried in the ground until I see proper to report the death, and you and your Ferrets can bury it, can you not?"

"Yes, sir; only I hope they won't stampede."

"Can you not trust them?"

"Oh, yes, sir, with my life, only I fear they will not wish to remain here after what has occurred."

"Yes, they will not desert you."

"But I will search the body now, for any clue that may be found, and then we will take a look over the mansion, after which I will go where the surgeon is waiting and return with him to the city."

"Yes, sir, and I will still remain here?"

"In your retreat, yes, but not in your house."

Dick Doom then searched the body thoroughly, and found a considerable sum of money, a watch, chain, and a few trinkets, with a card upon which there was an address, but no name.

These he carefully wrapped up in his handkerchief, and then folding the hands upon the heart, and covering the form with the sheet, he said:

"Now take the lantern, Nick, and we will have a look over the house."

Nick obeyed in silence, and the door was closed behind them when they left the room of death.

They went from room to room, hall to hall, and floor to floor, and at last came to a hallway leading to a side entrance of the mansion.

As they did so they heard a low growl, followed by the rattling of a chain.

"Ah! a dog," coolly said Dick Doom, and Nick flashed the light into the vestibule, and they saw a large dog chained to the door-knob.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BUMB DETECTIVE.

THE dazzling light of the bull's-eye lantern flashing in the face of the dog, seemed to cower the savage animal, for he possessed a vicious look.

He was fastened only by a light chain attached to a massive brass collar, and had doubtless been left there when his master entered the house.

Without hesitation Dick Doom stepped forward, with a stern command to the dog, while Nick anxiously called out:

"Be careful, sir, for he will spring upon you."

But Dick Doom did not heed, and repeated his command:

"Down, sir, down!"

At the same instant he flashed the bull's-eye into the brute's face and placed his hand boldly upon his head.

The dog was mastered at once, and Dick Doom turned the collar around to look for a name and address.

"There is only his name here, Nick, that of Mephisto."

"Parson?"

"Yes."

"That was the name of Mr. Sanford's dog, you remember, for you know he called to him by that name to be quiet the night he was arrested."

"Yes, Nick, and the dog shall be our detective now."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Sanford was in this house when you shot Buttons."

"Yes, sir."

"He made his escape by way of the window we found open, and looking out upon the roof of the rear piazza, against which grows that large tree."

"Yes, sir, and that is the way they came in and left the house."

"Beyond a doubt."

"Now, there is but one bed in the house that has been occupied, and that one who slept there was Buttons, from what you told me."

"Yes, sir."

"Sanford, therefore, came to visit Buttons here, and you surprised them, and one escaped, the other lies dead up-stairs."

"When Sanford came he either brought this dog with him, or Buttons kept the animal, though I believe the former was the case, as the dog would have been loose if he was stopping here."

"It would seem so, sir, but, this door has been opened, you see, so that Buttons must have let Sanford in here, and also the dog, but in escaping he got out the nearest way, for he knew the house well, as he used to pass much time here when engaged to Miss Marlborough."

"Yes, Nick, and the dog will take his master's trail, where he came down from the roof, or tree, and will track him right to his present place of abode."

"Good! but will he obey you?"

"Yes, Nick, for somehow I have wonderful power over animals, and I never saw the dog I was afraid of, or that would attack me."

"I wish I could say the same, sir; but dogs seem to have a grudge against me."

"Well, Nick, we have no time to lose, so let me out of this door with the dog, and you come out the way you went in and join me at the tree."

This Nick did, the dog going with Dick Doom as he would with his own master.

When Nick came out of the house, he found Dick Doom and the dog by the tree, and the detective said:

"Come on, Nick."

The dog had caught the scent and had his nose to the ground, while, held by the chain in Dick Doom's hand, he started off slowly following the track of his master.

"Don't forget the surgeon, sir," said Nick, as they went near the spot appointed to meet him.

"No, you go and say that I sent you to tell him I would not need his services, and I will wait for you here with the dog."

Nick bounded away and found the surgeon asleep in the police ambulance, the driver keeping watch.

Delivering his message he returned to find Dick Doom waiting with the dog, the lat-

ter very anxious to continue on the track of his master.

"Now, Mephisto, take up the trail once more, and lead us to your master's hiding-place," said Dick Doom, and the Dumb Detective started once more upon the scent, little dreaming in his hope of joining his master that he would be betraying him to his foes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SECRET TOLD.

THE dog continued on his way, pulling hard on the chain held in the hand of Dick Doom, and though at times he was at fault, he soon regained the scent and held on as before.

Several officers were met, and a few stragglers returning to their homes, and twice Dick Doom had to stop and show his badge to the policemen, who were impressed by the strange sight of two persons following a huge dog through the streets at such an hour of the night.

The dog led them down Michigan avenue for a long distance, then turned by a cross street into Cottage Grove avenue and held this until he reached State street.

He made his way then by a cross street to Plymouth Place and started to run up the steps of a house in a window of which a single light was visible.

"Take the number, Dick, and then follow me," said Dick Doom, and he was forced to be very firm with the dog to get him to leave the place.

But he had mastered the animal by his stronger human will, and the brute trotted along sullenly by his side without appearing longer to feel any interest in life.

He did not notice any scent then, and as though to show his displeasure he growled at Nick when he came up.

"Here is the number, sir, written as well as I could in the dark," said Nick.

It was growing light now, and Dick Doom hastened along toward his hotel, telling Nick to accompany him and he could rest in one of his bed-rooms, for the detective had a way of always having two rooms and a parlor when he stopped at a hotel that he might better appear in his disguises and arrange surprises for those whom he wished to surprise.

Arriving at the hotel they went up to the detective's rooms, and the dog was told to lie down upon the rug and he obeyed in silence.

"Now, Nick, that is your room, and you can sleep until noon, when I will also get up."

"Now to have a look at this address."

He glanced at the address Nick had taken down and said:

"We are right, Nick."

"I am glad of that, sir."

"That is, our dumb detective was right, for this is the same address as the one on the card I took from Buttons."

"Then there can be no mistake, sir."

"None, so retire and get a good rest and then I'll have something for you to do, for now we have direct work ahead of us."

Nick was asleep in a very few minutes, for he was very tired after his long row in the boat and walk while following the dog.

The scenes of the night, the dead form lying up in the Marlborough Mansion, all flashed before him, but he dismissed all thought by a strong effort of his will, and sunk into a deep sleep.

It was just noon when the detective appeared before him fully dressed, and called him.

Nick sprang to his feet in a startled way and said:

"Oh, it is you, sir?"

"Yes."

"And you are all dressed?"

"Yes, Nick, I have been out, and I'll tell you what I have done."

"Yes, sir, and you seem never to sleep."

"I do when I need sleep, though I can get along with very little."

"Now I went to an office building opposite to the one on Plymouth Place, and engaged a room there."

"I will make it an office, and I will have you on duty there to keep watch on the house where I am now certain that Sanford lives."

"I am ready, sir."

"You must get one of your Ferrets to help you, so one of you can be constantly on the watch, and you can arrange your desk so as to keep the house always in view."

"I understand, sir."

"You must report all you see going on there, and who leaves and goes to the house."

"I will, sir."

"You and your comrades are to be my clerks, and my business will be supposed to be literary."

"Yes, sir, I am glad you told me, as but a few of my Ferrets can spell or write; but I can get one who does as an assistant clerk."

"All right, go and get your breakfast now, then knock about the city until night, when you can go to your retreat and bury the body of the dead Buttons."

"Yes, sir, we'll bury him in one of the flower-beds in the garden to-night."

"Do so, and learn what your men have to report, after which come with the one you want as an assistant clerk, and report to the office in the morning."

"We'll be there, sir; but where is the dog?"

"I have given him to the porter to take care of for me."

Nick seemed relieved to find that the huge brute was not in the next room, and having completed his toilet he soon after left the hotel.

He went to the down-town rendezvous which he had with his Ferrets, and found them growing anxious about him, for he had not told them that he was going away, when he went into the Marlborough Mansion.

He knew that Tricks wrote a good hand and was an intelligent young fellow, and he singled him out as the one he desired to aid him as pretended clerk in the "Literary Bureau," and told the Ferrets he wished to have them all at the retreat that night soon after dark, for he had something to tell them of importance.

Soon after dark Nick made his way to the Marlborough stable.

All was dark there, as well as in the mansion; but the brave boy knew that there was a grim secret concealed by the darkness which he must make known to his comrades.

So he made his way into the stable and found that the Ferrets were all there and had supper ready, a cold snack, but a tempting one to a hungry person.

But Nick had no appetite, and sat gazing at his comrades while they ate with the relish that health and hunger give.

When the supper was over, Nick said in a tone that revealed that he had something important to communicate to them, and which they had already guessed by his manner:

"Comrades, I wish to tell you something very serious."

All were silent and anxious.

"I went last night into the big mansion."

"Alone?"

"Yes, Pete, alone."

"An' seen a ghost," said Dot.

"Yes, a ghostly form which turned out to be a man wrapped in a sheet."

"Lordy, but I'd have been scared," said Kid.

"I will tell you the secret, boys, and I want your help, for I need it badly."

"You shall have it," Pete Pepper remarked earnestly and in a chorus came the words:

"So say we all of us; Nick."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NIGHT BURIAL.

THE Ferrets were certainly greatly amazed at the story told them by Nick Norcross.

Each one of them gazed upon him with greater admiration as their Hero Captain, and wondered how he dared go alone into the mansion.

He told them frankly that Dick Doom had advised him to keep the affair a secret, even from the police, and to bury the body of Buttons that night, and await further instructions.

There was a consultation and it was decided that four of them would enter the mansion and bring the body, while four more would dig the grave.

In the stable were spades and shovels, and an old cot, which could be used as a stretcher to bring the body on.

Nick went out first and selected the spot for the grave, and the fresh earth was to be placed upon some blankets found there, so as not to betray them, if seen, and what remained over would be put into the lake.

A pile of weeds and brush was to be moved, and replaced over the grave, while a temporary coffin was made of two barrels, around which a blanket was to be wrapped.

When the four youths began to dig the grave, relieving each other as they needed rest, so as to keep the work progressing steadily, Nick and four others entered the mansion to bring out the body, the rest of the band going out to keep watch.

With his bull's-eye Nick led the way, and the boys, all with bare feet, for they had removed their shoes, followed him in dread silence.

Nick reached the room, hesitated, with his hand upon the knob, as though loth to enter, but then with a decided manner went in.

There lay the form of Buttons, covered with the sheet, as it had been left, and the boys looked at it with a shudder.

But Nick had nerved himself to his task and at once said in a whisper:

"Put the stretcher there, boys, and then help me."

They obeyed and the body was put upon it with almost tenderness in their manner of handling it.

"I'll lead the way," said Nick, and the four boys raised their ghastly burden and left the room.

Down the stairs they went, out through the lower floor, and by the covered passageway to the stable, the inner door of which had been opened.

There the body was wrapped securely in a couple of blankets and placed in the two barrels, which were also bound around with an old sail found in the stable.

Placing it then upon the cot, used as a stretcher, they bore it out into the garden, where the four young grave-diggers had a hole dug some three feet in depth.

If it was not an artistic grave in shape and depth, it at least answered the purpose, and the barrel-collined form of the unfortunate Buttons, was lowered into it.

The dirt was thrown in and packed down, that which remained over being carried in blankets to the bulkhead and dumped into the lake.

The weeds and brush, piled by the gardener to burn, were then placed over the grave and the young Ferrets returned to their retreat in the stable, Nick accompanied by Pete Pepper going back into the mansion to relock the doors and leave all as it had been found.

When they returned to the stable they found there their comrades discussing the situation in a low tone.

It was evident that the youths were nervous over the affair, and did not care to remain in the dread spot; but Pete Pepper said:

"See here, you chumps is scared I really believes.

"And what has yer to be scared about?"

"Dead folks," whispered Dot.

"Bah! dead folks don't cut no figure with Nick, and you knows that he was ther one ter do 'em, and if he don't skeer I don't see why you sh'u'd.

"Come, if yer is scared say so."

Thus appealed to the Ferrets remained silent.

If their silence was an affirmative that they were frightened, Nick Norcross would not so construe it, whatever he might think, for he said:

"I admit, boys, this is not a cheerful retreat; but never mind, we are earning a living and we are not going to mind any stories about this old place, and the fact that a poor fellow lies buried in the garden.

"Now let us all go to bed and get what rest we can, for Tricks and I have got to go on duty to-morrow for Dick Doom, and you all can look up clues as you have before, not only on the case we were set to work up, but shadow anything else that will help the police out and run down crooks, and you bet we will all make a home for ourselves yet."

"See?" said Pete in his slangy way, and they all seemed to "see," for they at once expressed their willingness to do just as their young captain wished them to do.

Half an hour after they were all slumbering quietly, forgetful of their ghastly work of the night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REPORT OF THE FERRETS.

NICK NORCROSS and Tricks reported at eight o'clock sharp at the office rented by Dick Doom, and the windows of which commanded a view of the house to which the dog had tracked his master the night before.

A desk and table, with several chairs, had already been put in the room, with paper, ink, and a few books, and a notice was put up on the door announcing that it was:

"RICHARDSON'S LITERARY BUREAU.

Private Office."

Dick Doom was there to set the boys to work, and he had gotten for them some books to read, to pass away the time, and a lounge had been bought on which they could rest when tired.

One of them was to keep on watch constantly, and he had a book in which he was to jot down all that he observed about the house opposite—who went there, who was seen to leave there, and anything that might seem worth knowing regarding the place and its inmates.

Leaving the two boys on watch, Dick Doom went to the office of the chief of the Secret Service.

He was admitted as soon as he had sent in his card, and the chief said laughingly:

"I declare, Dick, you look like the boss saint of the Salvation Army."

"I am glad I have that appearance, sir, for my disguise will not be penetrated; but I have news for you."

"Ah! and of importance, I'll guarantee."

"You shall be the judge, sir."

"In the first place, I wish to submit the reports of my Boy Ferrets."

"Ah! have they discovered anything?"

"Well, sir, here is the report of the two who got onto a counterfeit case, and shadowed the ones they overheard talking together several days ago.

"Send to this number, sir, after twelve to-night, and you will catch these three counterfeiters at work, with all their tools and bogus money."

"Good! that alone raises your Boy Ferrets in my estimation half a dozen notches.

"But which ones made this find?"

"Their names are on the report, sir."

"Good! they shall not be forgotten, for this is valuable work that they have done."

"Here is a report from two more, sir, whose names are here, for I have all of them dictate their finds, and you will see that they have run down the convict Stowhall, who was a life prisoner, and escaped some six months ago."

"Then they finger a thousand dollars reward for that find."

"Here is where the convict will be found, and he is a very dangerous man, so you will need to send several officers to capture."

"We'll catch him sure."

"Now, chief, here is where you will find bank cashier, Spendelle, who got away with so much money."

"He is working as a sailor upon a lake schooner, and came into port several days ago, with his beard grown out, and hoping not to be recognized."

"He is engaged to a girl, who as you know, remained true to him, and he sent her a note by one of my Ferrets, who read both it and the answer, and she, it seems, compromised herself by stating in it that she had all of his treasure safe, and would meet him at the hour and day he stated in his letter to her."

"That means that Spendelle got the girl to keep his stolen booty?"

"Yes, chief."

"Was the hour, day and place of meeting named?"

"It was, sir, and is in the report, as you notice."

"Yes, yes; well, Dick Doom, you have a treasure in your Boy Ferrets and no mistake."

"Have they any other reports?"

"Not now, sir."

"But they can find no trace of the man Sanford?"

"Well, yes, sir, I have a report to make about him that will surprise you; but I do so in confidence, for I am working out my plan in my own way."

"Your way is a good one always, Dick; but tell me if you know where Sanford fled when he left here?"

"I know that, as I suspected would be the case, chief, that he did not leave the city."

"Ha! he is here then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know where?"

"I think that I do, sir; but I owe it to the young captain of my Ferrets, Nick Norcross, that I made the discovery."

"I have nothing more to say, Dick, against your Boy Ferrets, for you were right, and I wrong in believing they would be valuable aids in shadowing criminals."

"I am sure that you will yet find them so, sir; but let me tell you just what has been accomplished, and how it was done."

Then Dick Doom told the chief of Nick's adventure in the Marlborough Mansion, and the tragedy there, with the escape of Merton Sanford, who had been tracked by his dog.

"I will send at once and pull the place," said the chief eagerly.

"Oh no, chief, for I will attend to that in good time, when I know that the bird is in the cage," was the quiet response of Dick Doom.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON WATCH.

THE two young Ferrets, Nick and Tricks, devoted themselves to their work of watching the house opposite the office of the "Literary Bureau."

Nick took the first watch, while Tricks got a novel and started to read it.

With a book in front of him, to jot down his discoveries in, Nick began to closely observe the premises opposite to him.

It was a fair-looking brick house of three stories and a basement, and with an alley at one side.

The curtains were down in the upper room, but the parlor floor was open, and in the basement a woman was seen moving about from time to time.

About ten o'clock a well-dressed woman, wearing a veil, was seen to leave the house and walk leisurely down the street.

Nick wrote down the hour, and a description of the woman.

"At noon she returned and a boy accompanied her bearing several bundles."

The boy left them at the door and the woman disappeared, while at Nick's request Tricks ran down to interview the boy.

Tricks was an adept at that work, and catching up with the boy said:

"Ho, sonny, you dropped your knife."

"Guess you've got a ball in your pocket."

"Guess I has," was the prompt reply, and Tricks's knife was pocketed with perfect composure.

"I thought I seen yer drop it, but I wasn't sure, but I concluded I'd ask yer."

"Yes, it's me knife, and I wouldn't hev lost it for a dollar."

"Does yer live round here?"

"Naw."

"Well, I has got ter go up to Number — on this here street, and I has lost the note I had to deliver."

"Does yer know who lives there?"

"Yes, she give her name as Mrs. Bridewell, at ther store, and told me ter take some goods there; but I got into a game o' marbles, and she come along and found me, and so she wouldn't give me a cent."

"Where does you work?"

"At old Isaac Halheimer's."

"What does he sell?"

"Second-hand clothes, theatrical goods and pawned things."

"Was she a actress?"

"I dunno, but she got some men's clothing, and a wig and other things, as she said there was to be a masquerade party."

"All right, I'll go up and give ther bluff and deliver a message, and get my money."

"Well, solong," and Tricks sauntered away in a leisurely manner, leaving the other youth, who had his knife, to hasten on congratulating himself upon his good luck.

But Tricks did not go to the house in question, but to the office, where he reported to Nick what he had heard.

Nick's quick wit caused him to act at once.

"See here, Tricks, I'll go to old Halheimer's and make a purchase of some kind, and then go to the house, and ask if the bundles she has did not get mixed, and in that way I'll see the woman and get a look at the inside of the house."

"Good!" said Tricks, and Nick at once set out upon the errand.

He made a purchase of a second-hand dress of the man, a wig and false beard, and set out for the house of Mrs. Bridewell.

A woman answered his ring, and it was the one he had seen in the basement windows.

She had a hard face and said gruffly:

"What do you want?"

"Mrs. Bridewell bought some goods at our place, and I guess they got mixed, so I came to see."

"Give me the bundle."

"No, I want to see Mrs. Bridewell, for them is my orders."

"Then come along; but I wasn't going to steal your bundle."

"No, ma'am, I didn't think you was; but I'd got licked if I didn't do as I was told."

"Your lickin' wouldn't be one amiss, I guess," growled the woman, and she led the way into a rear room where a woman sat by the window, and a man by a table looking over some papers.

Upon the floor lay the purchases Mrs. Bridewell had made at Halheimer's.

The woman was handsome, over thirty, and eyed the visitor sharply.

The man had gray hair and beard, and gave a quick glance at Nick, who explained why he had come.

"No, these things are all right, just as I bought them, tell Mr. Halheimer, and the mistake was made elsewhere."

Nick insisted upon showing the contents of his bundle, and Mrs. Bridewell remarked:

"No, they are not mine."

"Buy them anyhow, for they may be useful," growled the man.

The woman asked Nick if he knew the value of the goods; he told her, and the man paid for them.

Nick left the house with a smile upon his face, went around the block to the door of the building in which was his "office," and said as he entered:

"Tricks, I saw the woman and the man, also the working-girl, and they are a hard lot."

"Ever see 'em before, Nick?"

"No, but I kept my eyes opened, and if the man isn't disguised, then I don't know anything when I see it."

"He's a young man, but his hair and beard were gray, and if not false, I'm greatly mistaken."

"Do you think it is him?"

"I really do," was the solemn answer.

CHAPTER XXX.

PICKING UP CLUES.

DICK DOOM led the officers in their raid upon the counterfeiters' den, and surprised the men at work.

He captured the three of them, and all of their utensils, and a lot of counterfeit money as well.

The detective was also at the rendezvous appointed between the defaulting cashier, Spendelle, and his lady love, and the two were captured at the depot when about to board a midnight train for the West.

In their baggage was found the money which the cashier had defrauded the bank of, and the thief and his accomplice were taken to jail to await trial for their crimes, for the girl was an accomplice of her lover, as was proven when their baggage was searched.

The escaped convict, Stowhall, was next captured in his hiding-place, and all these captures were set down to the credit of Dick Doom and his Ferrets, the latter having unearthed the crooks.

Having made his captures, and gotten papers giving a claim for the reward for the capture of the bank cashier, the convict and the counterfeiters, Dick Doom had time to look up his two allies on watch at the Literary Bureau.

"Well, Nick, I have good news for you, as the people are bagged, and the treasury of the Boy Ferrets will soon have a nest-egg in it of several thousand dollars."

"Now what have you discovered here?"

"Here is Tricks's report, sir, and mine, and I guess we are on the right track."

"To catch Sanford?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective took the reports and went carefully over them.

"Well, Nick, you and Tricks have certainly proven yourselves expert shadowers, and I'll give you a holiday this afternoon, while I stand guard here."

"Look up your comrades and tell them I want them all to meet me here in this office soon after dark."

"We'll be here, sir."

With this the boys left and Dick Doom sat down by the window and again looked over the reports written down.

At last he came to the following, which he read aloud:

"Saw old Graybeard come out, walking with a stick, and go down the street."

"He returned in an hour, and later saw

another old gent, with smooth face, spectacles and dressed in black, come out and go up the street.

"Am sure he was the same as the gray-beard, for I watched their size and step closely."

Then there was a report of that afternoon, stating that a rough-looking man, with bearded face, and dressed in checked shirt and over-hauls, had gone out a short while before.

The words followed:

"He was the same build as the two old men, and walked like them."

"I'll await his return," said Dick Doom, and he kept his eyes upon the street.

Just as it was growing dark the rough-looking man returned, and Dick Doom's gaze was riveted upon him.

"Nick has keen eyes to see through that disguise, for disguise it is; yes, and I believe that it is none other than the crook I want."

"Well, my Ferrets will be here soon, and later we will know what that house contains."

A few minutes after Nick Norcross came into the office alone.

"Well, Nick, have you seen your Ferrets?"

"Yes, sir, and they'll be here to-night."

"Tricks went up to the old mansion to tell the others, as soon as it got dark, and they'll be along in time."

"Good! Now, Nick, I have something for you to do."

"Certainly, sir."

"You went to the house with the bundle?"

"Yes, sir."

"After awhile I want you to go again and say that Halheimer sent you back with the money to get the things, for you had sold other people's goods."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you to see if the man and woman are there, and get whatever information you can, while, when you stand by the door unfasten the catch on the lock so that it will be easily opened."

"I'll try, sir."

"When you come out you will find me here, and when your Ferrets arrive we will proceed to work."

"If we only catch our man," said Nick earnestly.

"If you do, the chief will be proud to acknowledge my Boy Ferrets as dandies in Secret Service work."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SHADOWED TO THE END.

THE Ferrets dropped into the "Literary Bureau" one by one, soon after dark, Dick Doom explaining to the janitor of the building that he had a class of young men, and accompanied his explanation with a five-dollar bill that kept him from being rude to his young visitors.

Dick Doom was in the office and received the young Ferrets, and when all had arrived Nick Norcross started out upon his mission across the way.

They saw him ring at the door, and a head appear in a window above and look down to see who it was.

Some words followed and then Nick was seen to enter the house.

He was gone some fifteen minutes, when he reappeared carrying a bundle, walked down the street, and soon after entered the office, which was dark, save for the light from the street-lamps.

"Well, Nick, you got into the house, I saw?"

"Yes, sir, and slipped the catch on the lock."

"Whom did you see?"

"The ugly dame who stays below stairs, sir, and then Mrs. Bridewell and the old gent, only he wasn't an old man *this* time."

"What was he?"

"He was the bearded tough in workman's clothes I saw go out this morning."

"Well?"

"But he was the old man, too, for he forgot about his age when I was there before, and said that they wanted to keep the things."

"And then?"

"I told them that old Halheimer was as mad as a hornet, had licked me for selling the things, and sent the money to get them back, and if I did not get them, he intended to send an officer."

"Ah! so you got them?"

"You bet I did, sir, and the beard was the one the man had on, and he had to go out and take it off, sending it in by the woman."

"Did you make any other discovery, Nick?"

"Well, sir, I am sure I heard voices upstairs, but they did not go in the front door, that is certain."

"You have done well, Nick, and now we will prepare for work, for I will have you aid me in the capture, not calling upon Headquarters for officers."

The Ferrets all felt proud of this distinction, and when Dick Doom opened a heavy bundle he had brought with him, and took out some silver stars of the Secret Service, they were delighted.

"Now, boys, I wish to say that I will arm but three of you, Nick Norcross, Pete Pepper, and Tricks."

"I wish to divide your force in three, sending two to the front door, one to the rear, and one to the alley, the latter of three each."

"That leaves five of you to go into the house with me, and somehow I have an idea that we will need a show of force."

"I'm sure there is a gang in the house, sir, and they went in after dark and by the rear way," Nick declared.

Having organized his Boy Ferrets, and explained to them just what he wished them to do, and to keep cool and make no mistakes, Dick Doom left the office with his little band.

They scattered when they reached the street, and divided into four parties.

But fifteen minutes after they began to assemble at the suspected house in Plymouth Place.

One party hid under the front area, a second went to the rear door, and a third halted beneath the windows opening into the alley.

The fourth party under Dick Doom, went up the steps and the detective tried the door and found that Nick had done his work well, for the latch turned under his grasp.

The house was black as midnight without, save for a glimmer of light in an upper window.

Stepping into the hall Dick Doom found a light burning dimly there.

He was followed by his party of Ferrets who moved as quietly as cats.

Going to the rear room, which Nick pointed out as the one in which he had seen the man and woman, Dick Doom suddenly threw it open.

Only a woman was there, and Nick said quickly:

"It is Mrs. Bridewell."

In an instant Dick Doom stood by her side; his handcuffs were upon her wrists before she could utter a word in her amazement and terror, and she heard the words:

"If you utter a cry you shall die, for we broke into this house to get a prize."

The woman sunk down in her chair speechless, and swooned away.

"Watch her, Dot, while we go up-stairs," ordered Dick Doom, and he led his Boy Ferrets to the second floor above, where voices were heard.

Listening without, Dick Doom decided

that there were no less than five men in the room; so, to make a greater show of strength, he sent down for one of the other parties.

They soon arrived, and then Dick Doom opened the door, and, a revolver in each hand, while his Boy Ferrets crowded behind him, he called out:

"Hands up all! The detectives are in possession!"

There were oaths, startled cries and a slight show of resistance by one man who was at once seized by his comrades, one of whom cried:

"Don't be a fool, captain, for if you kill it means the gallows."

"You are wise, my man; it does mean the gallows."

"Nick, slip the bracelets on these men, and leave the captain to me," and Dick Doom stepped forward, and with a skill that practice had made perfect, slipped a pair of bracelets upon the wrists of the man who had attempted to draw a revolver.

"There, these are my gold bracelets, captain, and you should feel honored."

"Now let me see if we have not met before."

As the detective spoke he whisked off the false beard and wig worn by his prisoner, and the face of Merton Sanford was revealed!

The artful villain now was as pale as death, and it could be seen that his companions were surprised at the unmasking, evidently not suspecting that their leader was in disguise.

"Now, men, which one of you wants to squeal and go free?" asked Dick Doom, and eagerly came a response in a woman's voice:

"I will!"

It was the woman who had been left in Dot's charge, and who, "playing possum," had suddenly dealt him a stunning blow and run up stairs.

Finding she was too late she took quick advantage of Dick Doom's offer and he replied:

"Very well; I accept you as State's evidence, madam; but you must be a prisoner until your testimony is given."

She sighed, but held out her hands in their manacles and said:

"I am content."

CONCLUSION.

THE haul was a grand one, so said the chief, for Merton Sanford was recaptured and returned to his cell, and the testimony of the woman, who gave her name as Blanche Bridewell, was to the effect that she had long been the partner of Sanford in his criminal career.

She stated that he had organized a band of men and women crooks, who were kept busy robbing houses, people and stores, and put their plunder in a common pool, which Sanford disposed of elsewhere and paid the members of the band a commission.

She alone knew Sanford as he really was, for he always appeared in disguise when meeting the members of the band.

When he had escaped from prison he had come to her home and sought a hiding-place there, going out only in disguise.

What he had done with his money she did not know, or professed not to do so; but she turned over a small quantity of plunder then in her keeping, and gave the names and addresses of the band as well as she knew them.

With such testimony a dozen more of the Chicago crooks were arrested, and the woman was given her freedom after she had sworn to her testimony, which would be used against her confederates in crime.

Once the shock of recapture was over, Merton Sanford was as cool as an icicle and wholly indifferent to his fate, to all appearances.

The Boy Ferrets were now recognized as able allies, by the chief, who, however, at the request of Dick Doom, still allowed them to remain unknown to the detective and police force, for it was thought that they could render better service by remaining under suspicion of being crooks themselves, and the result of their future work proved that the great detective was quite right.

The killing of Buttons, by Nick Norcross, was kept a secret, at Dick Doom's desire.

Then the work of the Boy Ferrets began in other fields, in which they showed themselves worthy of their noted Secret Service leader, and that they deserved the name he gave them of the Fatal Shadowers.

THE END.

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